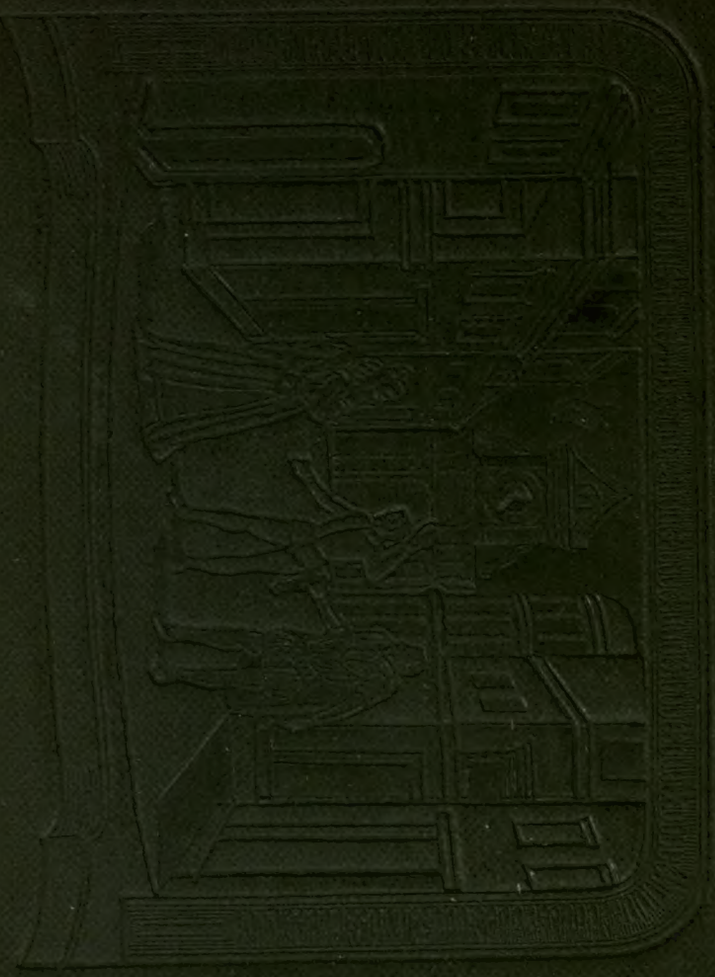
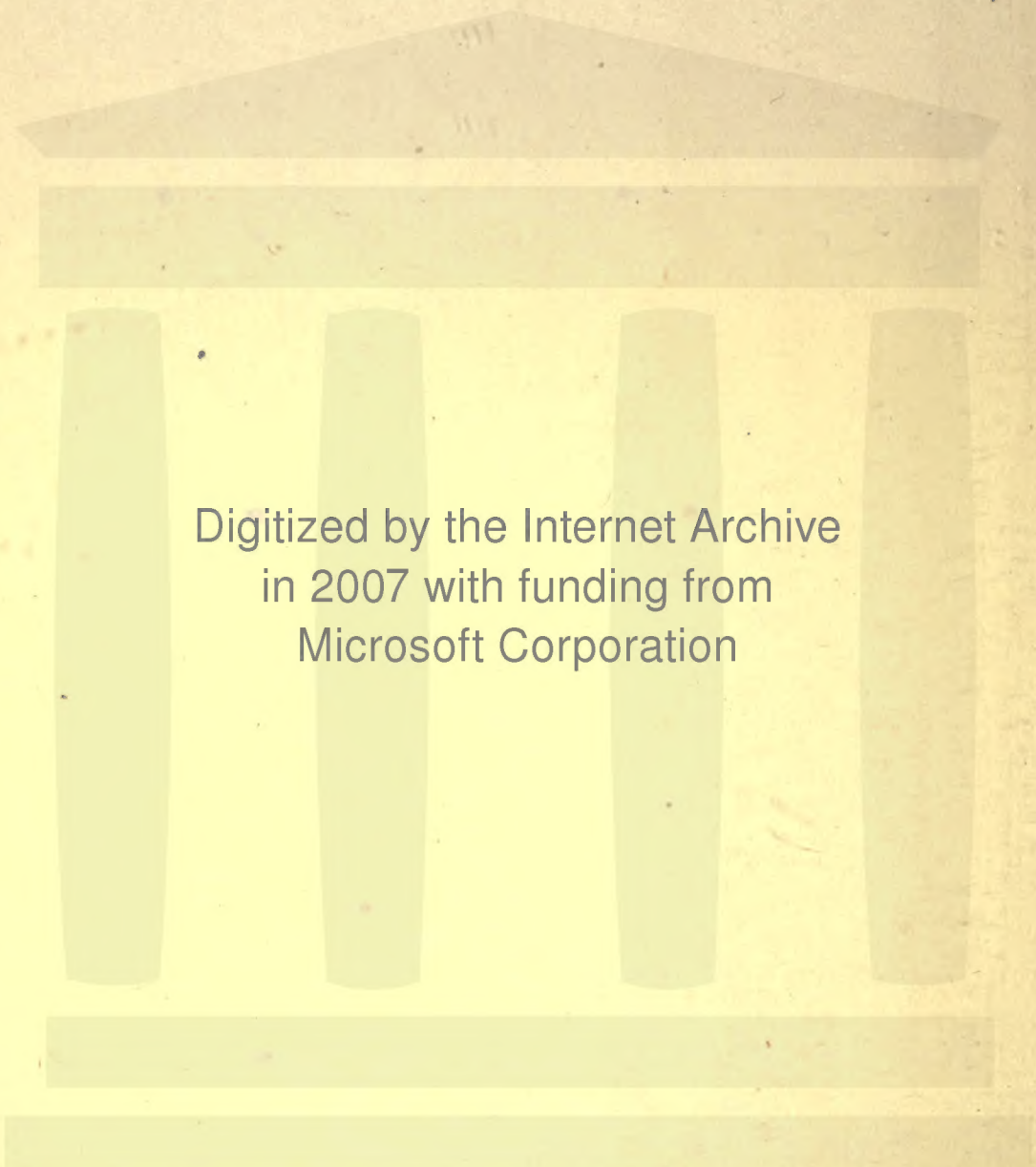
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A BOOK
ABOUT THE THEATER



LE BALLET DE LA REINE

A FRENCH COURT BALLET IN
THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY

A BOOK ABOUT THE THEATER

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY; MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS



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TO AUGUSTUS THOMAS

My Dear Augustus:

Let me begin by confessing my regret that I cannot overhear your first remark when you receive this sheaf of essays, many of which are devoted to the subordinate subdivisions of the art of the stage. As it is, I can only imagine your surprise at discovering that this book, which contains papers dealing with certain aspects of the theater rarely considered to be worthy of criticism, is signed by the occupant of the earliest chair to be established in any American university specifically for the study of dramatic literature. I fancy I can hear the expression of your wonder that a sexagenarian professor should turn aside from his austere analysis of the genius of Sophocles and of Shakspere, of Molière and of Ibsen, to discuss the minor arts of the dancer and the acrobat, to chatter about the conjurer and the negro minstrel, to consider the principles of pantomime and the development of scene-painting. But I am emboldened to hope that your surprise will be only momentary, and that you will be moved to acknowledge that perhaps there may be some advantage to be derived from these deviations into the by-paths of stage history.

You are rather multifarious yourself; "like Cerberus, you are three gentlemen at once"; you have been

a reporter, you have published a novel, you have painted pictures, you have delivered addresses—and you write plays, too. I think that you, at least, will readily understand how a student of the stage may like to stray now and again from the main road and to ramble away from the lofty temple of dramatic art to loiter for a little while in one or another of its lesser chapels. And you, again, will appreciate my conviction that these loiterings and these strollings may be as profitable as that casual browsing about in a library which is likely to enrich our memories with not a little interesting information that we might never have captured had we adhered to a rigorous and rigid course of study. You will see what I mean when I declare my belief that I have come back from these wanderings with an increased understanding of the theory of the theater, and with an enlarged acquaintance with its manifold manifestations.

Perhaps I ought to explain, furthermore, that these excursions into the purlieus of the playhouse began long, long ago. I gave a Punch and Judy show before I was sixteen; I performed experiments in magic, I blacked up as Tambo, I whitened myself as Clown, I played the low-comedy part in a farce, and I attempted the flying trapeze before I was twenty; and I was not encouraged by the result of these early experiences to repeat any of the experiments after I came of age. I think it was as a spinner of hats and as the underman of a "brothers' act" that I came nearest to success; at least I infer this from the fact—may I mention

it without seeming to boast?—that with my partners in this brothers' act, I was asked if I would care to accept an engagement with a circus for the summer. As to the merits of the other efforts I need say nothing now; the rest is silence. When the cynic declared that the critics were those who had failed in literature and art, he overstated his case, as is the custom of cynics. But it is an indisputable advantage for any critic to have adventured himself in the practise of the art to the discussion of which he is to devote himself; he may have failed, or at least he may not have succeeded as he could wish; but he ought to have gained a firmer grasp on the principles of the art than he would have had if he had never risked himself in the vain effort.

With this brief word of personal explanation I step down from the platform of the preface to let these various essays speak for themselves. If they have any message of any value, I feel assured in advance that your friendly ear will be the first to interpret it. And I remain,

Ever yours,

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	The Show Business	1
II.	The Limitations of the Stage	17
III.	A Moral from a Toy Theater	37
IV.	Why Five Acts?	55
V.	Dramatic Collaboration	77
VI.	The Dramatization of Novels and the Novelization of Plays	93
VII.	Women Dramatists	111
VIII.	The Evolution of Scene-Painting	127
IX.	The Book of the Opera	153
X.	The Poetry of the Dance	169
XI.	The Principles of Pantomime	185
XII.	The Ideal of the Acrobat	201
XIII.	The Decline and Fall of Negro-Minstrelsy	217
XIV.	The Utility of the Variety-Show	235
XV.	The Method of Modern Magic	251

CONTENTS

		PAGE
XVI.	The Lamentable Tragedy of Punch and Judy	271
XVII.	The Puppet-Play, Past and Present . .	287
XVIII.	Shadow-Pantomime, with All the Modern Improvements	303
XIX.	The Problem of Dramatic Criticism . .	319

ILLUSTRATIONS

Le ballet de la reine *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Upper half of Plate No. 1, the 'Miller and His Men' 40

A group of the principal characters from Pollock's juvenile drama, the 'Miller and His Men' 42

Explosion of the mill. A back drop in the 'Miller and His Men' 46

Plate No. 7, the 'Miller and His Men' 48

Lower half of Plate No. 5, the 'Miller and His Men' 52

The Roman Theater at Orange 134

The multiple set of the French medieval stage 134

The set of the Italian comedy of masks 134

An outdoor entertainment in the gardens of the Pitti Palace in Florence in the early sixteenth century 136

The set for the opera of 'Persée' (as performed at the Opéra in Paris in the seventeenth century) 140

A prison (designed by Bibiena in Italy in the eighteenth century) 140

The screen scene of the 'School for Scandal' at Drury Lane in 1778 144

A landscape set 146

A set for the opera of 'Robert le Diable' 146

The set of the last act of the 'Garden of Allah' 148

A set for 'Medea' 148

ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING PAGE

The set of 'Œdipe-Roi' (at the Théâtre Français) 150

The set of the 'Return of Peter Grimm' 150

Scenes from Punch and Judy 274

Scenes from Punch and Judy (continued) 276

Roman puppets. Greek and Roman puppets. Puppet of Java . 290

A Sicilian marionette show 292

A Belgian puppet. A Chinese puppet theater. Puppet figure representing the younger Coquelin 294

Puppets in Burma 296

The puppet play of Master Peter (Italian) 296

A Neapolitan Punchinella 300

The broken bridge. Plan showing the construction of a shadow-picture theater. A Hungarian dancer (a shadow picture) . 308

Shadow Pictures. The return from the Bois de Boulogne. The ballet. A regiment of French soldiers 310

Shadow Picture. The Sphinx I: Pharaoh passing in triumph . 312

Shadow Picture. The Sphinx II: Moses leading his people out of Egypt 314

Shadow Picture. The Sphinx III: Roman warriors in Egypt . 316

Shadow Picture. The Sphinx IV: The British troops to-day . 318

I

THE SHOW BUSINESS

THE SHOW BUSINESS

I

At an interesting moment in Disraeli's picturesque career in British politics he indulged in one of his strikingly spectacular effects, in accord with his characteristic method of boldly startling the somewhat sluggish imagination of his insular countrymen; and in the next week's issue of *Punch* there was a cartoon by Tenniel reflecting the general opinion in regard to his theatrical audacity. He was represented as Artemus Ward, frankly confessing that "I have no principles; I'm in the show business."

The cartoon was good-humored enough, as *Punch's* cartoons usually are; but it was not exactly complimentary. It was intended to voice the vague distrust felt by the British people toward a leader who did not scrupulously avoid every possible opportunity to be dramatic. And yet every statesman who was himself possessed of constructive imagination, and who was therefore anxious to stir the imaginations of those he was leading, has laid himself open to the same charge. Burke, for one, was accused of being frankly theatrical; and Napoleon, the child of that French Revolution which Burke combated with undying vigor, never hesitated to employ kindred devices. When Napoleon took the Imperial Crown from the hands of the Pope

to place it on his own head, and when Burke cast the daggers on the floor of the House of Commons, they were both proving that they were in the show business. So was Julius Cæsar when he thrice thrust aside the kingly crown; and so was Frederick on more than one occasion. Even Luther did not shrink from the spectacular if that could serve his purpose, as when he nailed his theses to the door of the church.

If the statesmen have now and again acted as tho they were in the show business, we need not be surprised to discover that the dramatists have done it even more often, in accord with their more intimate relation to the theater. No one would deny that Sardou and Boucicault were showmen, with a perfect mastery of every trick of the showman's trade. But this is almost equally true of the supreme leaders of dramatic art, Sophocles, Shakspere, and Molière. The great Greek, the great Englishman, and the great Frenchman, however much they might differ in their aims and in their accomplishments, were alike in the avidity with which they availed themselves of every spectacular device possible to their respective theaters. The opening passage of 'Œdipus the King,' when the chorus appeals to the sovran to remove the curse that hangs over the city, is as potent on the eye as on the ear. The witches and the ghost in 'Macbeth,' the single combats and the bloody battles that embellish many of Shakspere's plays are utilizations of the spectacular possibilities existing in that Elizabethan playhouse, which has seemed to some historians of the

drama to be necessarily bare of all appeal to the senses. And in his 'Amphitryon' Molière has a succession of purely mechanical effects (a god riding upon an eagle, for example, and descending from the sky) which are anticipations of the more elaborate and complicated transformation scenes of the 'Black Crook' and the 'White Fawn.'

At the end of the nineteenth century the two masters of the stage were Ibsen and Wagner, and both of them were in the show business—Wagner more openly and more frequently than Ibsen. Yet the stern Scandinavian did not disdain to employ an avalanch in 'When We Dead Awaken,' and to introduce a highly pictorial shawl dance for the heroine of his 'Doll's House.' As for Wagner, he was incessant in his search for the spectacular, insisting that the music-drama was the "art-work of the future," since the librettist-composer could call to his aid all the other arts, and could make these arts contribute to the total effect of the opera. He conformed his practise to his principles, and as a result there is scarcely any one of his music-dramas which is not enriched by a most elaborate scenic accompaniment. The forging of the sword, the ride of the Valkyries, the swimming of the singing Rhinemaidens, are only a few of the novel and startling effects which he introduced into his operas; and in his last work, 'Parsival,' the purely spectacular element is at least as ample and as varied as any that can be found in a Parisian fairy-play or in a London Christmas pantomime. And what is the 'Blue Bird'

of M. Maeterlinck, the philosopher-poet, who is also a playwright, but a fairy-play on the model of those long popular in Paris, the 'Pied de Mouton,' and the 'Biche au Bois'? It has a meaning and a purpose lacking in its emptier predecessors; but its method is the same as that of the uninspired manufacturers of these spectacular pieces.

II

It is not without significance that our newspapers, which have a keen understanding of the public taste, are in the habit of commenting upon entertainments of the most diverse nature under the general heading of "Amusements." It matters not whether this entertainment is proffered by Barnum and Bailey, or by Weber and Fields, by Sophocles or by Ibsen, by Shakspere or by Molière, by Wagner or by Gilbert and Sullivan, it is grouped with the rest of the amusements. And this is not so illogical as it may seem, since the primary purpose of all the arts is to entertain, even if every art has also to achieve its own secondary aim. Some of these entertainments make their appeal to the intellect, some to the emotions, and some only to the nerves, to our relish for sheer excitement and for brute sensation; but each of them in its own way seeks, first of all, to entertain. They are, every one of them, to be included in the show business.

This is a point of view which is rarely taken by those who are accustomed to consider the drama only in its

literary aspects, and who like to think of the dramatic poet as a remote and secluded artist, scornful of all adventitious assistance, seeking to express his own vision of the universe, and intent chiefly, if not solely, on portraying the human soul. And yet this point of view needs to be taken by every one who wishes to understand the drama as an art, for the drama is inextricably bound up with the show business, and to separate the two is simply impossible. The theater is almost infinitely various, and the different kinds of entertainment possible in it cannot be sharply distinguished, since they shade into each other by almost imperceptible gradations. Only now and again can we seize a specimen that completely conforms to any one of the several types into which we theoretically classify the multiple manifestations of the drama.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth might seem, at first sight, to stand absolutely outside the theater. But it is impossible not to perceive the close kinship between the program of the Barnum and Bailey show and the program of the New York Hippodrome, since they have the circus in common. At the Hippodrome, however, we have at least a rudimentary play with actual dialog and with abundant songs and dances executed by a charging squadron of chorus-girls; and in this aspect its spectacle is curiously similar to the nondescript medley which is popularly designated as a "summer song-show." Now, the summer song-show is first cousin to the so-called American "comic opera"—so

different from the French *opéra comique.* Even if it has now fallen upon evil days, this American comic opera is a younger sister of the sparkling ballad-opera of Gilbert and Sullivan, and of the exhilarating *opéra bouffe* of Offenbach, with its libretto by Meilhac and Halévy.

We cannot fail to perceive that the librettos of Gilbert and of Meilhac and Halévy are admirable in themselves, that they would please even without the music of Sullivan and Offenbach, and that they are truly comedies of a kind. That is to say, the books of 'Patience' and 'Pinafore' do not differ widely in method or in purpose from Gilbert's non-musical play 'Engaged'; and the books of the 'Vie Parisienne' and the 'Diva' do not differ widely from Meilhac and Halévy's non-musical play, 'Tricoche et Cacolet.' 'Engaged' and 'Tricoche et Cacolet' are farces or light comedies, and we find that it is not easy to draw a strict line of demarcation between light comedies of this sort and comedies of a more elevated type. Gilbert was also the author of 'Sweethearts,' and of 'Charity,' and Meilhac and Halévy were also the authors of 'Froufrou.' Still more difficult would it be to separate sharply plays like 'Charity' and 'Froufrou' from the social dramas of Pinero and Ibsen, the 'Benefit of the Doubt,' for instance, and the 'Doll's House.' Sometimes these social dramas stiffen into actual tragedy, the 'Second Mrs. Tanqueray,' for example, and 'Ghosts.' And more than one critic has dwelt upon the structural likeness of the somber and austere 'Ghosts' of Ibsen to the elevated and noble

'Œdipus the King' of Sophocles, even if the Greek play is full of a serener poetry and charged with a deeper message.

It is a far cry from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles; but they are only opposite ends of a long chain which binds together the heterogeneous medley of so-called "amusements." In the eyes of every observer with insight into actual conditions, the show business bears an obvious resemblance to the United States, in that it is a vast territory divided into contiguous States, often difficult to bound with precision; and, like the United States, the show business is, in the words of Webster, "one and indivisible, now and forever." There is indisputable profit for every student of the art of the stage in a frank recognition of the fact that dramatic literature is inextricably associated with the show business, and the wider and deeper his acquaintance with the ramifications of the show business, the better fitted he is to understand certain characteristics of the masterpieces of dramatic literature. Any consideration of dramatic literature, apart from the actual conditions of performance, apart from the special theater for which any given play was composed, and to the conditions of which it had, perforce, to conform, is bound to be one-sided, not to say sterile. The masterpieces of dramatic literature were all of them written to be performed by actors, in a theater, and before an audience. And these masterpieces of dramatic literature which we now analyze with reverence, were all of them im-

mediately successful when represented by the performers for whom they were written, and in the playhouses to the conditions of which they had been adjusted.

It is painfully difficult for the purely literary critic to recognize the inexorable fact that there are no truly great plays which failed to please the contemporary spectators for whose delight they were devised. Many of the plays which win success from time to time, indeed, most of them, achieve only a fleeting vogue; they lack the element of permanence; they have only theatrical effectiveness; and they are devoid of abiding dramatic value. But the truly great dramas established themselves first on the stage; and afterward they also revealed the solid qualities which we demand in the study. They withstood, first of all, the ordeal by fire before the footlights of the theater, and they were able thereafter also to resist the touchstone of time in the library.

When an academic investigator into the arid annals of dogmatic disquisition about the drama was rash enough to assert that, "from the standpoint of the history of culture, the theater is only one, and a very insignificant one, of all the influences that have gone to make up dramatic literature," Mr. William Archer promptly pointed out that this was "just about as reasonable as to declare that the sea is only one, and a very insignificant one, among the influences that have gone to the making of ships." It is true, Mr. Archer admitted, that there are "model ships and ships built

for training purposes on dry land; but they all more or less closely imitate sea-going vessels, and if they did not, we should not call them ships at all. . . . The ship-builder, in planning his craft, must know what depths of water—be it river, lake, or ocean—she will have to ply in, what conditions of wind and weather she may reckon upon encountering, and what speed will be demanded of her if she is to fulfil the purpose for which she is destined. . . . The theater—the actual building, with its dimensions, structure, and scenic appliances—is the dramatist's sea. And the audience provides the weather."

III

Since the drama is irrevocably related to the theater, all the varied ramifications of the show business have their interest and their significance for students of the stage. It is not too much to say that there is no form of entertainment, however humble and however remote from literature, which may not supply a useful hint or two, now and again, to the historian of the drama. For example, few things would seem farther apart than the lamentable tragedy of Punch and Judy and the soul-stirring plays of the Athenian dramatic poets; and yet there is more than one point of contact between these two performances. An alert observer of a Punch-and-Judy show in the streets of London can get help from it for the elucidation of a problem or two which may have puzzled him in his

effort to understand the peculiarities of Attic tragedy. Mr. Punch's wooden head, for example, has the same unchanging expression which characterized the towering masks worn by the Athenian performers. In like manner a nondescript hodgepodge of funny episodes, interspersed with songs and dances, such as Weber and Fields used to present in New York, may be utilized to shed light on the lyrical-burlesques of Aristophanes as these were performed in Athens more than two thousand years ago.

Perhaps even a third instance of this possibility of explaining the glorious past by the humble present may not be out of place. A few years ago Edward Harrigan put together a variety-show sketch, called the 'Mulligan Guards,' and its success encouraged him to develop it into a little comic drama called the 'Mulligan Guards' Picnic,' which was the earliest of a succession of farcical studies of tenement-house life in New York, culminating at last in a three-act comedy, entitled 'Squatter Sovereignty.' In this series of humorous pieces Harrigan set before us a wide variety of types of character, Irishmen of all sorts, Germans and Italians, negroes and Chinamen, as these are commingled in the melting-pot of the cosmopolitan metropolis. These humorous pieces were the result of a spontaneous evolution, and their author was wholly innocent of any acquaintance with the Latin drama. And yet, as it happened, Harrigan was doing for the tenement-house population of New York very much what Plautus had done for the tenement-house popula-

tion of Rome. A familiarity with the plays of the Latin playwright could not but increase our appreciation of the amusing pieces of the Irish-American sketch-writer; and a familiarity with the comic dramas of Harrigan could not fail to be of immediate assistance to us in our desire to understand the remote life which Plautus was dealing with.

The plays of the Roman dramatist were deliberately adapted from the Greek, and they therefore had an avowedly literary source, whereas the immediate origin of the plays performed in New York was only an unpretending sketch for a variety-show; but both of these groups had the same flavor of veracity in their reproduction of the teeming life of the tenements. Humble as is the beginning of the 'Mulligan Guard' series, at least as humble is the beginning of the improvised pieces of the Italians, the comedy of masks, which Molière lifted into literature in his 'Etourdi,' and in his 'Fourberies de Scapin.' In the hands of the Italians the comedy of masks was absolutely unliterary, since it was not even written, and its performers were not only comedians, but acrobats also. And here the drama is seen to be impinging on the special sphere of the circus—just as it does again in the plays prepared for the New York Hippodrome. It is more than probable that this improvised comedy of the Italians is the long development of a primitive semi-gymnastic, semi-dramatic entertainment, given by a little group of strollers, performing in the open market-place to please the casual crowd that might collect.

Equally unpretending was the origin of the French melodrama, which Victor Hugo lifted into literature in his 'Hernani' and 'Ruy Blas.' It began in the temporary theaters erected for a brief season in one or the other of the fairs held annually in different parts of Paris. The performances in these playhouses were almost exactly equivalent to those in our variety-shows; they were medleys of song and dance, of acrobatic feats and of exhibitions of trained animals. As in our own variety-shows, again, there were also little plays performed from time to time, at first scarcely more than a framework on which to hang songs and dances, but at last taking on a solider substance, until finally they stiffened themselves into pathetic pieces in three or more acts, capable of providing pleasure for a whole evening. The humor was direct, and the characters were painted in the primary colors; the passions were violent, and the plots were arbitrary; but the playwrights had discovered how to hold the interest of their simple-minded spectators, and how to draw tears and laughter at will.

In fact, the more minutely the history of the stage is studied, the more clearly do we perceive that the beginnings of every form of the drama are strangely unpretentious, and that literary merit is attained only in the final stages of its development. Dramatic literature is but the ultimate evolution of that which in the beginning was only an insignificant and unimportant experiment in the show business; and it must always remain intimately related to the show business, even

when it climbs to the lonely peaks of the poetic drama. Whatever its value, and however weighty its message, it is still to be commented upon under the head of "amusements," for if it does not succeed in amusing, it ceases to exist except in the library, and even there only for special students. It lives by its immediate theatrical effectiveness alone, even if it can survive solely by its literary quality.

IV

Those who are in the habit of gaging the drama by this literary quality only are prone to deplore the bad taste of the public which flocks to purely spectacular pieces. But this again is no new thing, and it does not disclose any decline in the ability to appreciate the best. A century ago in London, when Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble were in the full plenitude of their powers, and when they were performing the noblest plays of Shakspere, they were thrust aside for a season or two while the theater was given up to empty melodramatic spectacles like 'Castle Specter' and the 'Cataract of the Ganges.' It was horrifying to the lovers of the drama that these great actors in those great plays should have to give way to the attraction exerted on the public by a trained elephant, or by an imitation waterfall; but it is equally horrifying to be informed that the theater in London for which Shakspere wrote his masterpieces, and in which he himself appeared as an actor, was also used for fencing-matches, and for

bull-baitings and bear-baitings, and that the theater in Athens for which Sophocles wrote his masterpieces, and in which he may have appeared as an actor, was also used for the annual cock-fight.

So strong is the popular appreciation of spectacle that the drama, the true theater as distinguished from the mere show business, has always to fight for its right to exist, and to hold its place in competition with less intellectual and more sensational entertainments. The playhouses of any American city are likely to have a lean week whenever the circus comes to town, and perhaps the chief reason why the most of them now close in summer is to be sought not so much in the frequent hot spells, as in the irresistible attraction exerted by the base-ball games. The drama in Spain, which flourished superbly in the days of Lope de Vega and Calderon, sank into a sad decline when it had to compete with the fiercer delights of the bull-fight; and the drama in Rome was actually killed out by the overpowering rivalry of the sports of the arena, the combats of gladiators, and the matching of men with wild beasts. What is known to the economists as Gresham's Law, according to which an inferior currency always tends to drive out a superior, seems to have an analog in the show business.

(1912.)

II

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STAGE

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STAGE

I

FEW competent critics would dispute the assertion that the drama, if not actually the noblest of the arts, is at all events the most comprehensive, since it can invoke the aid of all the others without impairing its own individuality or surrendering its right to be considered the senior partner in any alliance it may make. Poetry, oratory, and music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, these the drama can take into its service, with no danger to its own control. Yet even if the drama may have the widest range of any of the arts, none the less are its boundaries clearly defined. What it can do, it does with a sharpness of effect and with a cogency of appeal no other art can rival. But there are many things it cannot do; and there are not a few things that it can attempt only at its peril. Some of these impossibilities and inexpediencies are psychologic subtleties of character and of sentiment too delicate and too minute for the magnifying lens of the theater itself; and some of them are physical, too large in themselves to be compressed into the rigid area of the stage. In advance of actual experiment, it is not always possible for even the most experienced of theatrical experts to decide the question with certainty.

Moreover, there is always the audience to be reck-

oned with, and even old stagers like Henry Irving and Victorien Sardou cannot foresee the way in which the many-headed monster will take what is set before it. When Percy Fitzgerald and W. G. Wills were preparing an adaptation of the 'Flying Dutchman' for Henry Irving, the actor made a suggestion which the authors immediately adopted. The romantic legend has for its hero a sea-captain condemned to eternal life until he can find a maiden willing to share his lot; and when at last he meets the heroine she has another lover, who is naturally jealous of the new aspirant to her hand. The young rival challenges Vanderdecken to a duel, and what Irving proposed was that the survivor of the fight should agree to throw the body of his rival into the sea, and that the waves should cast up the condemned Vanderdecken on the shore, since the ill-fated sailor could not avoid his doom by death at the hand of man. This was an appropriate development of the tale; it was really imaginative; and it would have been strangely moving if it had introduced into it a ballad on the old theme. But in a play performed before us in a theater its effect was not altogether what its proposer had hoped for, altho he presented it with all his marvelous command of theatrical artifice.

The stage-setting Irving bestowed upon this episode was perfectly in keeping with its tone. The spectators saw the sandy beach of a little cove shut in by cliffs, with the placid ocean bathed in the sunset glow. The two men crossed swords on the strand; Vanderdecken let himself be killed, and the victorious lover carried

his rival's body up the rocks and hurled it into the ocean. Then he departed, and for a moment all was silence. A shuddering sigh soon swept over the face of the waters, and a ripple lapped the sand. Then a little wave broke on the beach, and withdrew, rasping over the stones. At last a huge roller crashed forward and the sea gave up its dead. Vanderdecken lay high and dry on the shore, and in a moment he staggered to his feet, none the worse for his wounds. But unfortunately the several devices for accomplishing this result, admirable as they were, drew attention each of them to itself. The audience could not help wondering how the trick of the waves was being worked, and when the Flying Dutchman was washed up by the water, it was not the mighty deep rejecting Vanderdecken, again cursed with life, that the spectators perceived, but rather the dignified Henry Irving himself, unworthily tumbled about on the dust of his own stage. In the effort to make visible this imaginative embellishment of the strange story, its magic potency vanished. The poetry of the striking improvement on the old tale had been betrayed by its translation into the material realities of the theater, since the concrete presentation necessarily contradicted the abstract beauty of the idea.

Here we find ourselves face to face with one of the most obvious limitations of the stage—that its power of suggestion is often greater than its power of actual presentation. There are many things, poetic and imaginative, which the theater can accomplish, after

a fashion, but which it ventures upon only at imminent peril of failure. Many things which are startlingly effective in the telling are ineffective in the actual seeing. The mere mechanism needed to represent them will often be contradictory, and sometimes even destructive. Perhaps it may be advisable to cite another example, not quite so cogent as Irving's 'Vanderdecken,' and yet carrying the same moral. This other example will be found in a piece by Sardou, a man who knew all the possibilities of the theater as intimately as Irving himself, and who was wont to utilize them with indefatigable skill. Indeed, so frequently did the French playwright avail himself of stage devices, and so often was he willing to rely upon them, that not a few critics of our latter-day drama have been inclined to dismiss him as merely a supremely adroit theatrical trickster.

In his sincerest play, 'Patrie,' the piece which he dedicated to Motley, and which he seems himself to have been proudest of, Sardou invented a most picturesque episode. The Spaniards are in possession of Brussels; the citizens are ready to rise, and William of Orange is coming to their assistance. The chiefs of the revolt leave the city secretly and meet William at night in the frozen moat of an outlying fort. A Spanish patrol interrupts their consultation, and forces them to conceal themselves. A little later a second patrol is heard approaching, just when the return of the first patrol is impending. For the moment it looks as tho the patriots would be caught between the two Spanish

companies. But William of Orange rises to the occasion. He calls on his "sea-wolves"; and when the second patrol appears, marching in single file, there suddenly spring out of the darkness upon every Spanish soldier two fur-clad creatures, who throttle him, bind him, and throw him into a hole in the ice of the moat. Then they swiftly fill in this gaping cavity with blocks of snow, and trample the path level above it. And almost immediately after the sea-wolves have done their deadly work and withdrawn again into hiding, the first patrol returns, and passes all unsuspecting over the bodies of their comrades—a very practical example of dramatic irony.

As it happened, I had read 'Patrie' some years before I had an opportunity to see it on the stage, and this picturesque scene had lingered in my memory so that in the theater I eagerly awaited its coming. When it arrived at last I was sadly disappointed. The sea-wolves belied their appetizing name; they irresistibly suggested a group of trained acrobats, and I found myself carelessly noting the artifices by the aid of which the imitation snowballs were made to fill the trap-door of the stage which represented the yawning hole in the ice of the frozen moat. The thing told was picturesque, but the thing seen was curiously unmoving; and I have noted without surprise that in the latest revival of 'Patrie' the attempt to make this episode effective was finally abandoned, the sea-wolves being cut out of the play.

II

In 'Patrie' as in 'Vanderdecken' the real reason for the failure of these mechanical devices is that the plays were themselves on a superior level to those stage-tricks; the themes were poetic, and any theatrical effect which drew attention to itself interrupted the current of emotional sympathy. It disclosed itself instantly as incongruous, as out of keeping with the elevation of the legend—in a word, as inartistic. A similar effect, perhaps even more frankly mechanical, would not be inartistic in a play of a lower type, and it might possibly be helpful in a frankly spectacular piece, even if this happened also to be poetic in intent. In a fairy-play, a *féerie*, as the French term it, we expect to behold all sorts of startling ingenuities of stage-mechanism, whether the theme is delightfully imaginative, as in Maeterlinck's beautiful 'Blue Bird,' or crassly prosaic, as in the 'Black Crook' and the 'White Fawn.'

In picturesque melodrama also, in the dramatization of 'Ben Hur,' for example, we should be disappointed if we were bereft of the wreck of the Roman galley, and if we were deprived of the chariot race. These episodes can be presented in the theater only by the aid of mechanisms far more elaborate than those needed for the scenes in 'Vanderdecken' and 'Patrie'; but in 'Ben Hur' these mechanisms are not incongruous and distracting as were the simpler devices of 'Vanderdecken' and 'Patrie,' because the dramatization of

the romanticist historical novel is less lofty in its ambition, less imaginative, less ethereally poetic. In 'Vanderdecken' and in 'Patrie' the tricks seemed to obtrude themselves, whereas in 'Ben Hur' they were almost obligatory. In certain melodramas with more modern stories—in the amusing piece called the 'Round Up,' for example—the scenery is the main attraction. The scene-painter is the real star of the show. And there is no difficulty in understanding the wail of the performer of the principal part in a piece of this sort, when he complained that he was engaged to support forty tons of scenery. "It's only when the stage-carpenters have to rest and get their breath that I have a chance to come down to the footlights and bark for a minute or two."

A moment's consideration shows that this plaintive protest is unreasonable, however natural it may be. In melodramas like the 'Round Up' and 'Ben Hur,' as in fairy-plays like the 'Blue Bird,' the acting is properly subordinated to the spectacular splendor of the whole performance. When we enter a theater to behold a play of either of these types, we expect the acting to be adequate, no doubt, but we do not demand the highest type of histrionic excellence. What we do anticipate, however, is a spectacle pleasing to the eye and stimulating to the nerves. In plays of these two classes the appeal is sensuous rather than intellectual; and it is only when the appeal of the play is to the mind rather than to the senses that merely mechanical effects are likely to be disconcerting.

Mr. William Archer has pointed out that Ibsen in 'Little Eyolf,' has for once failed to perceive the strict limitation of the stage when he introduced a flagstaff, with the flag at first at half-mast, and a little later run up to the peak. Now, there are no natural breezes in the theater to flutter the folds of the flag, and every audience is aware of the fact. This, then, is the dilemma: either the flag hangs limp and lifeless against the pole, which is a flat spectacle, or else its folds are made to flutter by some concealed pneumatic blast or electric fan, which instantly arouses the inquiring curiosity of the audience. Here we find added evidence in support of Herbert Spencer's invaluable principle of Economy of Attention, which he himself applied only to rhetoric, but which is capable of extension to all the other arts—and to no one of them more usefully than to the drama. At any given moment a spectator in the theater has only so much attention to bestow upon the play being presented before his eyes, and if any portion of his attention is unduly distracted by some detail—like either the limpness or the fluttering of a flag—then he has just so much less to give to the play itself.

Very rarely, indeed, can we catch Ibsen at fault in a technical detail of stage-management; he was extraordinarily meticulous in his artful adjustment of the action of his social dramas to the picture-frame stage of our modern cosmopolitan theater. He was marvelously skilful in endowing each of his acts with a background harmonious for his characters; and nearly

always was he careful to refrain from the employment of any scenic device which might attract attention to itself. He eschewed altogether the more violent spectacular effects, altho he did call upon the stage manager to supply an avalanch in the final act of 'When the Dead Awaken'; but even this bold convulsion of nature was less incongruous than might be expected, since it was not exhibited until the action of the play itself was complete. In fact, the avalanch might be described as only a pictorial epilog.

III

The principle of sternly economizing the attention of the audience can be violated by distractions far less extraneous and far less extravagant than avalanches. When Marmontel's forgotten tragedy of 'Cleopatra' was produced in the eighteenth century at the Théâtre Français, the misguided poet prevailed upon Vaucanson to make an artificial asp, which the Egyptian queen coiled about her arm at the end of the play, thereby releasing a spring, whereupon the beast raised its head angrily and emitted a shrill hiss before sinking its fangs into Cleopatra's flesh. At the first performance a spectator, bored by the tediousness of the tragedy, rose to his feet when he heard the hiss of the tiny serpent: "I agree with the asp!" he cried, as he made his way to the door.

But even if Vaucanson's skilful automaton had not given occasion for this disastrous gibe, whatever atten-

tion the audience might pay to the mechanical means of Cleopatra's suicide was necessarily subtracted from that available for the sad fate of Cleopatra herself. If at that moment the spectators noted at all the hissing snake, then they were not really in a fit mood to feel the tragic death-struggle of "the serpent of old Nile." A kindred blunder was manifest in a recent sumptuously spectacular revival of 'Macbeth,' when the three witches flew here and there thru the dim twilight across the blasted heath, finally vanishing into empty air. These mysterious flittings and disappearances were achieved by attaching the performers of the weird sisters to invisible wires, whereby they could be swung aloft; the trick had been exploited earlier in the so-called Flying Ballet, wherein it was a graceful and amusing adjunct of the terpsichorean revels. But in 'Macbeth' it emptied Shakspere's scene of its dramatic significance, since the spectator waited for and watched the startling flights of the witches, and admired the dexterity with which their aerial voyages were controlled; and as a result he failed to feel the emotional importance of the interview between Macbeth and the withered croons, whose untoward greetings were to start the villain-hero on his downward career of crime.

In this same revival of 'Macbeth' an equally misplaced ingenuity was lavished on the apparition of Banquo's ghost at the banquet. The gruesome specter was made mysteriously visible thru the temporarily transparent walls of the palace, until at last he emerged

to take his seat on Macbeth's chair. The effect was excellent in itself, and the spectators followed all the movements of the ghost with pleased attention, more or less forgetting Macbeth, and failing to note the maddening effect of the apparition upon the seared countenance of the assassin-king. In this revival of 'Macbeth' no opportunity was neglected to adorn the course of the play with every possible scenic and mechanic accompaniment; and the total result of these accumulated artificialities of presentation was to rob one of Shakspere's most poetic tragedies of nearly all its poetry, and to reduce this imaginative masterpiece to the prosaic level of a spectacular melodrama.

Another of Shakspere's tragedies has become almost impossible in our modern playhouses, because the stage-manager does not dare to do without the spectacular effects that the story seems to demand. Shakspere composed 'King Lear' for the bare platform-stage of the Globe Theater, devoid of all scenery, and supplied with only the most primitive appliances for suggesting rain and thunder; and he introduced three successive storm scenes, each intenser in interest than the one that went before, until the culmination comes in perhaps the sublimest and most pitiful episode in all tragedy, when the mad king and his follower, who is pretending to be insane, and his faithful fool are together out in the tempest. At the original production, three centuries ago, the three storms may have increased in violence as they followed one another; but at best the fierceness of the contending elements

could then be only suggested, and the rain and the thunder were not allowed to divert attention away from the agonized plight of the mad monarch. But to-day the three storm scenes are rolled into one, and the stage-manager sets out to manufacture a realistic tempest in rivalry with nature. The mimic artillery of heaven and the simulated deluge from the skies which the producer now provides may excite our artistic admiration for his skill, but they distract our attention from the coming together of the characters so strangely met in the midst of the storm. The more realistically the tempest is reproduced the worse it is for the tragedy itself; and in most recent revivals the full effect of the painful story has been smothered by the sound and fury of the man-made storm.

The counterweighted wires which permit the figures of the Flying Ballet to soar over the stage and to float aloft in the air, disturb the current of our sympathy when they are employed to lend lightness to intangible creatures like the weird sisters of Shakspere's tragedy; but they have been more artistically utilized in two of Shakspere's comedies to suggest the ethereality of Puck and of Ariel. The action of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' takes place in fairy-land, and that of the 'Tempest' passes in an enchanted island, and even if we wonder for a moment how the levitation of these airy spirits is achieved, this temporary distraction of our attention is negligible in playful comedies like these with all their scenes laid in a land of make-believe. And yet it may be doubted whether even the 'Mid-

summer Night's Dream' and the 'Tempest,' fairy-plays as they are, do not on the whole lose more than they gain from elaborate scenic and mechanical adjuncts. They are of poetry all compact, and the more simply they are presented, the less obtrusive the scenery and the less protruded the needful effects, the more the effort of the producer is centered upon preserving the ethereal atmosphere wherein the characters live, move, and have their being, the more harmonious the performance is with the pure fancy which inspired these two delightful pieces, then the more truly successful is the achievement of the stage-manager.

IV

On the other hand, of course, the scenic accompaniment of a poetic play, whether tragic or romantic or comic, must never be so scant or so barren as to disappoint the spectators. The stage-accessories must be adequate and yet subordinate; they ought to resemble the clothes of a truly well-dressed woman, in that they never call attention to themselves altho they can withstand and even reward intimate inspection. This delicate ideal of artistic stage-setting, esthetically satisfying, and yet never flamboyant, was completely attained in the production of 'Sister Beatrice,' at the New Theater, due to the skill and taste of Mr. Hamilton Bell. The several manifestations of the supernatural might easily have been over-emphasized; but a fine restraint resulted in a unity of tone and of atmosphere,

so subtly achieved that the average spectator carried away the memory of more than one lovely picture without having let his thoughts wander away to consider by what means he had been made to feel the presence of a miracle.

The special merit of this production of 'Sister Beatrice' lay in the delicate art by which more was suggested than could well be shown. In the theater, more often than not, the half is greater than the whole, and what is unseen is frequently more powerful than what is made visible. In Mr. Belasco's 'Darling of the Gods,' a singularly beautiful spectacle, touched at times with a pathetic poetry, the defeated samurais are at last reduced to commit hara-kiri. But we were not made spectators of these several self-murders; we were permitted to behold only the dim cane-brake into which these brave men had withdrawn, and to overhear each of them call out his farewell greetings to his friends before he dealt himself the deadly thrust. If we had been made witnesses of this accumulated self-slaughter we might have been revolted by the brutality of it. Transmitted to us out of a vague distance by a few scattered cries, it moved us like the inevitable close of a truly tragic tale.

In the 'Aiglon' of M. Rostand, Napoleon's feeble son finds himself alone with an old soldier of his father's on the battle-field of Wagram; and in the darkness of the night, and in the turmoil of a wind-storm the hysteric lad almost persuades himself that he is actually present at the famous fight, that he can hear the

shrieks of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, and that he can see the hands and arms of the dead stretched up from the ground. This is all in the sickly boy's fancy, of course, and yet in Paris the author had voices heard, and caused hands and arms to be extended upward from the edge of the back drop, thus vulgarizing his own imaginative episode by the presentation of a concrete reality. Not quite so inartistic as this, and yet frankly freakish was the arrangement of the closet scene between Hamlet and his mother, when Sarah-Bernhardt made her misguided effort to impersonate the Prince of Denmark. On the walls of the room where Hamlet talks daggers to the queen there were full-length, life-sized portraits of her two successive husbands, and when Hamlet bids her look on this picture, and on this, the portrait of Hamlet's father became transparent, and in its frame the spectators suddenly perceived the ghost. This is an admirable example of misplaced cleverness, of the search for novelty for its own sake, of the sacrifice of the totality of impression to a mere trick.

'Hamlet' is the most poetic of plays, and the 'Aiglon' does its best to be poetic, and therefore the less overt spectacle there may be in the performance of these dramas the easier it will be for the spectator to focus his attention on the poetry itself. Even more pretentiously poetic than the 'Aiglon' is 'Chantecler,' upon which the ambitious author has also lavished a great variety of stage-effects—as tho he were not quite willing to rely for success upon his lyrical exuberance.

In M. Rostand's 'Aiglon' and 'Chantecler,' as in Sarah-Bernhardt's 'Hamlet,' there was to be observed a frequent confusion of the merely theatric with the purely dramatic—a confusion to be found forty years ago in Fechter's 'Hamlet.' That picturesque French actor made over the English tragedy into a French romantic melodrama; he kept the naked plot, and he cut out all the poetry. He lowered Shakspere's play to the level of the other melodramas in which he had won success—for instance, 'No Thorofare,' due to the collaboration of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, or the earlier 'Fils de la Nuit,' acted in Paris long before Fechter appeared on the English-speaking stage.

The 'Son of the Night' was a pirate bold, personated, of course, by Fechter, and in one act his long, low, rakish craft with its black flag flying, skimmed across the stage, cutting the waves, and dropping anchor close to the footlights. The surface of the sea was represented by a huge cloth, and the incessant motion of the waves was due to the concealed activities of a dozen boys. The play had so long a run that the sea-cloth was worn dangerously thin. At last at one performance, a rent spread suddenly and disclosed a disgusted boy, just as the pirate ship with the Son of the Night on its deck was preparing to come about. Fechter was equal to the emergency. "Man overboard!" he cried, and, leaning over the bow of the boat, he grabbed the boy by the collar and pulled him on deck. Probably very few of the spectators noticed the mishap, and if they had all observed it, what matter? A

laugh or two, more or less, during the performance of a prosaic melodrama, is of little or no consequence. A disconcerting accident like this in a play like the 'Son of the Night' does not cut any vital current of sympathy, for this is a quality to which the piece could make no claim. But in a truly poetic play a mishap of this sort would be a misfortune in that it might precipitate the interest and interrupt the harmony of attention demanded by the imaginative drama itself.

(1912.)

III

A MORAL FROM A TOY THEATER

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I

In 1881, when William Ernest Henley was hard put to it to make a living, Sir Sidney Colvin kindly recommended him for the editorship of the monthly *Magazine of Art*. Among the contributors whom the new editor called to his aid was Robert Louis Stevenson, and among the contributions the latter made to the former's magazine was the highly characteristic and self-revelatory essay, entitled 'A Penny Plain and Two Pence Colored,' now included in the volume called 'Memories and Portraits.' In this playful paper Stevenson makes one of his many returns to his boyhood, whose moods he could always recapture at will with the assistance of that imaginative memory which was one of his special gifts, and he was able to replevin from the dim limbo of things half forgotten his longing delight in the toy theater, the scenes for which and the necessary properties and the several characters themselves in their successive dresses were to be procured printed on very thin cardboard, so that the proud possessor might cut them out at will. If the youthful capitalist had accumulated twopence, he could acquire these treasures already resplendent in their glowing hues; and yet Stevenson held that the lad was happier who parted with only a single penny, reserving the half of his for-

tune for the purchase of the paints wherewith he might himself vivify this scenery and these properties, and so cause his characters to start to life, emblazoned in the bold colors which please the puerile mind.

These sheets of thin cardboard, with thin little pamphlets containing the text of the pieces to be performed in the toy theater, were originally known as Skelt's Juvenile Drama; and one Skelt seems to have been its originator, probably in the early part of the nineteenth century. Apparently he parted with his precious stock in trade to one Park, who passed it on in due season to one Webb, who transmitted it to one Redington, until at last it descended to its present owner, one B. Pollock, of 73 Hoxton Street, London, N. Stevenson affected to think that Skelt's Juvenile Drama had "become, for the most part, a memory"; yet it survives now in the second decade of the twentieth century as Pollock's Juvenile Drama, and Mr. Pollock proclaims that he has republished some score plays, and that he keeps them always in print, plain and colored. He offers, furthermore, to supply "Drop Scenes, Top Drops, Orchestras, Foot and Water Pieces, Single Portraits, Combats—Fours, Sixes, Twelves, Sixteens—Fairies, Horse Soldiers, Clowns, Rifles, Animals, Birds, Butterflies, Houses, Views, Ships, &c., plain and colored, ½*d* sheet plain, 1*d* sheet colored."

It is from the covers of "the book of the words" of the 'Miller and His Men' that this enticing proclamation is taken—the 'Miller and His Men,' "adapted only for Pollock's characters and scenes," and accompanied



First Scene when Set

Taken from upper half of Plate No. 1, which is the title-page of the series, this section of which is also a guide for the setting of the first scene in the 'Miller and His Men'

by "7 Plates characters, 11 Scenes, 3 Wings, Total 21 Plates." The persons of the drama and the scenes wherein that drama is played out to its fiery end, are all in the bolder manner of the Old Masters, who sought the broadest effects, and who willingly neglected petty details. How bold and how broad the manner and the effects can best be judged by an honest transcription from the final page of the book of words, wherein the terse and tense dialog, single speech clashing with single speech, is accompanied by stage directions for the instruction of the Young Masters who are about to produce the sublime spectacle:

Enter Grindorf left hand, plate 4.

Enter Karl and Friberg, swords drawn, plate 4, *followed by the Troops, right hand, plate* 7.

Grindorf: Ha! ha! I have escaped you, have I?

Karl: But you are caught in your own trap.

Grindorf: Spiller!—Golotz! Golotz! I say!

Count: Villain! you cannot escape us now! Surrender, or instantly meet thy fate!

Grindorf: Surrender! I have sworn never to descend from this place alive!

Enter Lothair, as Spiller, 3rd dress, left hand, plate 7.

Grindorf: Spiller, let my bride appear.

Exit Lothair.

Enter Kehnar, right hand, plate 1.

Enter Ravina with torch, plate 7.

Ravina: Before it is too late, restore Claudine to her father's arms!

Grindorf: Never!

Ravina: Then I know my course!

Enter Lothair with Claudine, left hand, plate 6.

Kehnar: My child! Ah, Grindorf, spare her!

Grindorf: Hear me, Count Friberg; if you do not withdraw your followers, by my hand she dies!

Count: Never, till thou art yielded to justice!

Grindorf: No more—this to her heart!

Lothair: And this to thine!

Exit Lothair and Claudine, and Grindorf.

Re-enter Grindorf and Lothair fighting, plate 6, *fight and exit.*

Grindorf to be put on wounded, plate 7.

Re-enter Lothair with Claudine, plate 6.

Lothair: Ravina, fire the train!

Scene changes to explosion, Scene 11, *No.* 9.

The words are striking and the actions are startling, and it is no wonder that plate 7 and scene 11, No. 9, filled with joy the heart of Robert Louis Stevenson when he was a perfervid Scot of fourteen. In his manly maturity, when he had risen to an appreciation of portraits by Raeburn, and when he had sat at the feet of that inspired critic of painting, his cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, he admitted that he had no desire to insist upon the art of Skelt's purveyors. "Those wonderful characters that once so thrilled our soul with their bold attitude, array of deadly engines and incomparable costume, to-day look somewhat pallidly," he confessed regretfully; "the extreme hard favor of the heroine strikes me, I had almost said with pain; the villain's scowl no longer thrills me like a trumpet; and the scenes themselves, those once incomparable landscapes, seem the efforts of a prentice hand. So much of fault we can find; but, on the other side, the impartial critic rejoices to remark the presence of a great unity of



A group of the principal characters from Pollock's juvenile drama, the 'Miller and His Men,' cut out and assembled as called for in Scene 10, a part of which is quoted in the text

gusto; of those direct claptrap appeals which a man is dead and buriable when he fails to answer; of the footlight glamor, the ready-made, barefaced, transpontine picturesque, a thing not one with cold reality, but how much dearer to the mind!"

II

"Transpontine" is a Briticism for which the equivalent Americanism is "Bowery." The plays which Skelt vended for the enjoyment of romantic youth were not of his own invention, nor were they the work of his hirelings; they were artfully simplified condensations of melodramas long popular in London at the theaters on the Surrey side of the Thames, and in New York at the Bowery. In French's Standard Drama, the Acting Edition, to be obtained in yellow covers for fifteen cents, one may find "the 'Miller and His Men,' a Melo-Drama in Two Acts, by F. Pocock, Esq., author of the 'Robber's Wife,' 'John of Paris,' 'Hit or Miss,' 'Magpie and the Maid,' etc., with original casts, scene and property plots, costumes, and all the stage business." And the list of properties required for the final scene helps to elucidate what may have been cryptic in the dialog quoted from the compacted adaptation of Skelt:

Scene 4:—*Slow match laid from stage in C. to mill. Lighted torch for Ravina. Red fire and explosion* 3 *E. L. H. Wood crash* 3 *E. L. H. Six stuffed figures of robbers behind mill, L. H. Eight guns, swords, and belts for hussars. Disguise cloak for Lothair. Fighting swords for Lothair and Wolf.* [Wolf is evidently another name for Grindorf.]

Thus we see that the pleasant country of the Skelts stretched from the Surrey side of the Thames to the Bowery bank of the Hudson, and that the Skeltic temperament was purely melodramatic, its bass notes being transposed to adjust it to the clear treble of boyhood. It is greatly to be regretted that no inquiring scholar has yet devoted himself to the task of tracing the history of English melodrama, as Professor Thorndike has traced the history of English tragedy. Of course, there have always been melodramatic plays ever since the drama began to assert itself as an independent form of art. There is a melodramatic element in the 'Medea' of Euripides, as there is in the 'Rodogune' of Corneille; and in the Elizabethan theater the so-called tragedy of blood is nothing if not melodramatic. Yet the special form of English melodrama that flourished in the later years of the eighteenth century and the earlier years of the nineteenth deserves a more careful study than it has yet received. Apparently it was due partly to a decadence of the native type of drama represented by Lillo's 'George Barnwell,' and partly to the stimulation received first from the emotional pieces of the German Kotzebue, and afterward from the picturesque pieces of the French Pixérécourt. And not to be neglected is the influence immediately exerted on the popular plays of the latter part of the period by the romances of Scott and of Cooper.

Altho these plays were devoid of literary merit, of style, of veracity of character delineation, of sincerity

of motive, they were not without theatrical effectiveness—or they could never have maintained themselves in the theater. As Sir Arthur Pinero has seen clearly, "a drama which was sufficiently popular to be transferred to the toy theaters was almost certain to have a sort of rude merit in its construction. The characterization would be hopelessly conventional, the dialog bald and despicable—but the situations would be artfully arranged, the story told adroitly and with spirit." In other words, the compounders of these melodramas were fairly skilful in devising plots likely to arouse and to sustain the interest of uncritical audiences. Probably they were unfamiliar with Voltaire's assertion that the success of a play depends mainly upon the choice of its story; and it is unlikely that they had any knowledge of Aristotle's declaration that plot is primarily more important than character; but they accomplished their humble task as well as if they had been heartened by these authorities. These ingenious and ingenuous pieces were none of them contributions to English dramatic literature, and they are not enshrined in its annals; but they were effective stage-plays, nevertheless, and they had, therefore, an essential quality lacking in the closet-dramas which Shelley and Byron were composing in those same years.

III

In the illuminating lecture on Stevenson as a writer of plays delivered by Sir Arthur Pinero in 1903 before the members of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, the confessions contained in 'A Penny Plain and Two Pence Colored' are skilfully employed to explain Stevenson's flat failure as a playwright. Many of his ardent admirers must have wondered why it was that he adventured four times into dramatic authorship, only to undergo a fourfold shipwreck. Yet Sir James Barrie and Mr. John Galsworthy, essayists and novelists at first, as Stevenson was, strayed successfully from prose fiction into the acted drama. Was not Stevenson as anxious for this theatrical triumph as any one of these? Was he not as richly dowered with dramatic power, as inventive, as responsive to opportunity, as ready to master a new craft? Why, then, did he fail where they have succeeded?

For these baffling questions Sir Arthur Pinero has an acceptable answer. Stevenson was unable to establish himself as a play-maker, first, because he did not take the art of play-making seriously; he did not put his full strength in it, mind and soul and body, contenting himself when he was a man with playing at play-making as he had played with his toy theater when he was a boy. The second cause of his disappointment as a dramatist was due to the abiding influence of this toy theater, and to the fact that the



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Explosion of the mill. A back drop in the 'Miller and His Men,' Scene II

pieces he attempted were planned in rivalry with the 'Miller and His Men,' and therefore that they were hopelessly out of date before they were conceived. (There is a third reason, not mentioned by Sir Arthur, and yet suggesting itself irresistibly to any one who knew the editor of the *Magazine of Art* personally; all four of Stevenson's attempts at play-writing were made in collaboration with Henley, who was the least equipped by temper and by temperament for the practise of dramaturgy.)

Yet even if Stevenson had worked alone, and even if he had taken the new art seriously, he could never have won a place among the playwrights until he had fought himself free from the sinuous coils of Skeltery. In his youth he had saved his pence to purchase the accessories of Skelt's Juvenile Drama with boyish delight in the acquisition of things longed for to be possessed at last. When he had purchased plate 7 and scene 11, No. 9, he thought they were his possessions. But, of a truth, he was their possession, even if he did not know his slavery. As a man he was subdued to what he had worked in as a boy; and when he wanted to write plays of his own, he had no freedom to follow the better models of his own day; he was a bondman to Skelt, a thrall to Park, a minion to Webb, a chattel to Redington and to Pollock. "What am I?" he asked in his self-revelatory essay, humorously exaggerating, no doubt, yet subconsciously stating the exact truth; "What am I? What are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them? He stamped

himself upon my immaturity." And the impression was then so deep that it could not be effaced in maturity. The boy in Stevenson survived, instead of dying when the man was born.

The art of play-writing, like the art of story-telling, and, indeed, like all the other arts, demands both a native gift and an acquired craft. Its basic principles are the same ever since the drama began; but its immediate methods vary at different times and in different countries. While every artist must say what it is given him to say, he can say it acceptably only by acquiring the method of speech employed by his immediate predecessors. However original he may prove himself at the end, in the beginning he can only imitate the methods and borrow the processes and avail himself of the practises which the elder craftsmen are employing successfully at the moment when he sets himself to learn their trade. He must—to use the apt term of the engineers—he must keep himself abreast of "state of the art." This is what the great dramatists have ever done; Sophocles follows in the footsteps of Æschylus, as Shakspere emulates Marlowe and Kyd, and as Molière went to school to the adroit and acrobatic Italian comedians. These great dramatists were perfectly content to begin by taking over the patterns devised by their immediate predecessors in play-making, even if they were soon to enlarge these patterns and so modify them to suit their even larger needs.

Now, the state of the art when Stevenson turned to the theater was in accord with the picture-frame stage



Plate No. 7, complete as published, ready to be cut out and put into use in the toy theater

of to-day, with a single set to the act, and without the soliloquies and the confidential asides to the audience which may then have been proper enough on the apron-stage of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even in the lower grade of playhouse, where rude and crude melodramas were performed, the method and the manner of the 'Miller and His Men' had long departed. The pleasure that melodrama can give is perennial; but its processes vary in accord with the changing conditions of the theater. The door was open for Stevenson to write melodrama, if he preferred that species of play, and if he desired to varnish it with literature as he was to varnish the police-novel or mystery-story in the 'Wrecker.' But if he sought to do this, he was bound to inform himself as to the state of the art at the instant of composition. If he shut his eyes to the changed conditions of the theater since the 'Miller and His Men' had won a wide popularity in the playhouse, then he made an unpardonable blunder, for the battle was lost before he could deploy his forces. He might have been forewarned by the failure of Charles Lamb in a like attempt. When Lamb's Elizabethan imitation 'John Woodvil' was rejected for Drury Lane by John Philip Kemble as not "consonant with the taste of the age"; its exasperated author cried: "Hang on the age! I'll write for antiquity!" But those who write for antiquity cannot complain if they do not delight their contemporaries. It is to his contemporaries, and not to antiquity or to posterity, that every true dramatist has appealed.

IV

And as Stevenson might have taken warning from the sad fate of Lamb, so he might have found his profit in considering the happy fortune of Victor Hugo, who also had a taste for melodrama. When the leader of the French romanticists felt that it was incumbent upon him to conquer the theater which the classicists held as their last stronghold, he was swift to consider the state of the art. He sought immediate success upon the stage, and the most successful plays of that period in France were the melodramas of Pixérécourt, and of his followers, and therefore Hugo sat himself down to spy out the secrets of their craft. He made himself master of their methods, and he put together the striking and startling plots of 'Hernani' and 'Ruy Blas' in strict accord with their formulas, certain that he could varnish with literature their melodramatic actions. So glittering was his varnish, so brilliant was his metrical rhetoric, so glowing were his golden verses, that he blinded the spectators and kept the most of them from peering beneath at his arbitrary and artificial skeleton of supporting melodramatic structure. To-day, after fourscore years, we can see just what it is that Hugo did; and his plays, superb as they are in their lyric adornment, stand revealed as frank melodramas, lacking sincerity of motive and veracity of character drawing. But when Hugo wrote them they were in Kemble's phrase "consonant with the taste of

the age," and the best of them have not yet worn out their welcome in the theater.

Stevenson did not heed the warning of Lamb, and he did not profit by the example of Hugo. 'Deacon Brodie' was born out of date; so was 'Admiral Guinea'; and all the varnish of literature which the two collaborators applied externally and with loving solicitude availed naught. It is due to his entanglement in the strangling coils of Skeltery that Stevenson did not take the drama seriously. He seemed to have looked at it as something to be tossed off lightly to make money in the interstices of honest work. In his stories, long and short, he strove for effect, no doubt, but he was bent also on achieving sincerity and veracity. In his plays he made little effort for either sincerity or veracity, so far at least as his plot was concerned; and he thought he could lift these concoctions to the level of literature by the polish of his dialog, and by qualities applied on the outside instead of being developed from the inside. He seems to have believed that in the drama, at least, he could attain beauty by constructing his ornament instead of by ornamenting his construction, ignoring or ignorant of the fact that in the drama, the construction, if only it be solid enough, and four square to all the winds that blow, needs no ornament and is most impressive in its stark simplicity.

In his boyhood Goethe had also played with a toy theater, and it was a puppet-show piece which first called his attention to the mighty theme of his supreme poem; but the great German poet, captivated as he

may have been by his youthful experience, was able in his manhood to free himself from its shackles. He came in time to have a profound insight into the principles of dramatic art, and of the dramaturgic craft. In his old age he talked about the theater freely and frequently to Eckermann; and there are few of his utterances which do not furnish food for reflection. Here is one of them:

> Writing for the stage is something peculiar; and he who does not understand it had better leave it alone. Every one thinks that an interesting fact will appear interesting on the boards—nothing of the kind! Things may be very pretty to read, and very pretty to think about; but as soon as they are put upon the stage the effect is quite different; and that which has charmed us in the closet will probably fall flat on the boards. . . . Writing for the stage is a trade that one must understand, and requires a talent that one must possess. Both are uncommon, and where they are not combined, we have scarcely any good result.'

That Stevenson had the native gift of the dramatist is undisputable, and Sir Arthur Pinero in his lecture was able to make this clear. But "writing for the stage is also a trade that one must acquire"; and when Stevenson sought to acquire it he apprenticed himself to Skelt not to Sardou, to Redington and Pollock, not to Augier and Dumas.

(1914.)

P. S.—After the publication of this paper in *Scribner's Magazine*, a friendly reader in Great Britain was



Grindoff and banditti carousing. Lower half of Plate No. 5, Pollock's characters in the 'Miller and His Men'

kind enough to copy out for me this Skeltian lyric, which appeared in the London *Fun* in 1868, and which was probably rimed by Henry S. Leigh:

AN EARLY STAGE

Ah me! since first, long, long ago,
I learned to love the British stage,
It has—or I have—altered so,
It scarce receives my patronage!
Where are the villain's spangled tabs,
His cloak, his ringlets, and his belt?
Where are his scowls, his growls, his stabs,
As shown of old by Park and Skelt?

Once was I manager myself,
And played the 'Miller and his Men';
My company—ah, happy elf!
I had no trouble with them then—
They never sulked, forgot their lines,
Threw up their parts, or asked for "gelt"—
For as the reader p'r'aps divines—
I got them all of Park and Skelt.

I stuck them on, and cut them out,
I painted them with colors bright;
I scattered tinsel-specks about,
And made them things of beauty, quite—
Not joys forever—ne'ertheless,
They've vanished just as snowflakes melt.
None can restore the bliss, I guess,
I once derived from Park and Skelt.

How I revered the artist's skill
Who did my heroes represent—

With scowls the very soul to thrill—
 With one leg straight and one leg bent!
I loved his ladies full of grace,
 And on their beauties fondly dwelt:—
My first pictorial love could trace
 Her pedigree to Park and Skelt.

Ah me! 'tis many a year since I
 Those dear old plates—a penny plain
And two-pence colored—did espy;
 I ne'er shall see their like again!
The world's with disappointment rife,
 And I have far too often felt
That actors now are less like life
 Than those I bought of Park and Skelt!

IV

WHY FIVE ACTS?

WHY FIVE ACTS?

I

In the eighteenth century, both in England and in France, every stately and ponderous tragedy and every self-respecting comedy obeyed the obligation imposed by long tradition and duly stretched itself out to the full measure of five acts, no more and no less. It felt bound thus to distend itself, even tho its theme might be far too frail for so huge a frame, and even tho the unfortunate author often found himself at his wit's end to piece out his play's end. Any one who has had occasion to read widely in the works of the eighteenth century playwrights cannot fail to feel abundant sympathy for the harassed poet who plaintively called on Parliament to pass a law abolishing fifth acts altogether. This unduly distressed dramatist was an Englishman; but about the same time a Frenchman, weary of contemplating the frequent emptiness of the contemporary tragic stage, sarcastically remarked that, after all, it must be very easy *not* to write a tragedy in five acts.

Yet if tragedy was to be written at all, it had to have five acts, since a smaller number would not seem proportionate to a truly tragic subject. But why five acts? Why has five the number sacred to the tragic muse? Why did even the comic muse demand it?

Why does George Meredith, discussing comedy, declare that "five is dignity with a trailing robe; whereas one, or two, or three acts would be short skirts, and degrading." Why not three acts, or seven? Why was it that any other number of acts was unthinkable—or at least never thought of?

Questions like these seem to have floated before the mind of the Abbé d'Aubignac, writing in the seventeenth century, and he came very near putting to himself the query which serves as a title for this chapter. "Poets have generally agreed that all Drammas regularly should have neither more nor less than Five Acts; and the Proof of this is the general observation of it; but for the Reason, I do not know whether there be any founded in Nature. Rhetorick has this advantage over Poetry in the Parts of Oration, that the Exord, Narration, Confirmation and Peroration are founded upon a way of discoursing natural to all Men. . . . But for the Five Acts of the Drammatick Poem, they have not been framed upon any sound ground."

That the division of a drama into five parts was accepted in every civilized country as the only possible division, seems very strange indeed, when we consider that there is really no artistic justification for it, nor any logical necessity. Like every other work of art a play ought to have a single subject, a clearly defined topic; in other words, it ought to have Unity of Action. There is no denying that some of the greatest artists have, now and again, been tempted to deal with two themes at the same time, combining these as best they

could in a single work at the risk of leaving us a little in doubt as to their intention; but in the immense majority of acknowledged masterpieces the interest is carefully centered in a single object. In these masterpieces the action is single and unswerving, sweeping forward irresistibly to its inevitable end.

If, therefore, we accept the Unity of Action as a general rule, binding upon all artists, we can hardly deny that the most obviously natural arrangement for the story is to set it forth in one act, without any intermission or subdivision whatsoever—a single action in a single act. Yet it is the play in three acts which we are bound to recognize at once as possessing the ideal form, since it enables the dramatist to set apart the three divisions, which Aristotle declared to be essential to a well-constructed tragedy—the beginning, the middle, and the end—each presented in an act of its own. To put a play into more than three acts is possible only by halving one or another of these three essential parts. In a four-act play, the beginning may be split into two acts; and in a five-act play the middle may also be subdivided.

The logic of the three-act form, and the convenience of it also, are so obvious that ever since the tyranny of the Procrustean framework in five acts was abolished in the middle years of the nineteenth century, practical playwrights of all countries have favored it more and more. The young Dumas used it in his later plays, and so did Ibsen, that consummate master of stagecraft, emancipated from empty traditions, but profiting

shrewdly by every available device of his immediate predecessors. If the four-act form is also popular to-day, this seems to be because the modern dramatist, intending a play in three acts, finds himself forced by sheer press of matter, to subdivide one of the essential members, as Sir Arthur Pinero had to do in the 'Second Mrs. Tanqueray' and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones in the 'Liars.' Even the opera, which liked the larger framework of five acts when Scribe was writing librettos for Halévy and Meyerbeer, is now content with only three, since Wagner revealed his skill as a librettist.

It is true that Freytag, in his sadly old-fashioned treatise on 'Technic of the Drama,' accepted without cavil the five-act form, and even attempted to justify it by asserting that there are in fact five divisions of a tragic action. He symbolized the arrangement of a drama in a pyramidal structure, declaring that it ascends from the Introduction to the Climax, and then descends to the Catastrophe. Obviously these are only different terms for the beginning, the middle, and the end. But he vainly imagined two other members, the Rise, which intervenes between the Introduction and the Climax, and the Fall, which he inserted between the Climax and the Catastrophe. Obviously, again, this is an explanation after the event; and it seems to have its origin solely in his acceptance of the five-act form. And Freytag was forced to abandon his own theory when he considered honestly certain of the masterpieces of the modern drama. He admitted it to be "impossible that the single acts should correspond

entirely to the five great divisions of the action." He asserted that "in the Rising Action, the first stage was usually in the first act, the last sometimes in the third; of the Falling Action the beginning and the end were sometimes taken in the third and fifth acts." Yet he failed to see that if he made this admission, he cut the ground from under his feet, and that there was no longer any acceptable reason for his insistence upon the five-act form.

Freytag had no doubt at all as to the necessity of the division into five acts. He received it with blind faith, as tho it had been prescribed by divine authority. Yet if he had chosen to explore the early history of the drama in his own tongue, he would have found Hans Sachs sometimes extending his plays into six acts, and even into seven. And if he had cared to consider the drama of the Spaniards he would have seen that the most of the plays of Calderon are in three acts—a division which the great dramatic poet of Spain had taken over, as he had taken over so much else, from his masterful predecessor, Lope de Vega. In his interesting and illuminating little treatise on the art of writing plays, Lope de Vega gave the credit of establishing the three-act form to Virues. Plays had previously been written in four acts; as Lope puts it pleasantly: "The drama had gone on all fours, like a child, and truly it was then in its infancy."

Freytag ignored or was ignorant of Hans Sachs and Calderon. His mind was fixed on Goethe and on Schiller, altho his vision also included Shakspere, upon

whom the two German poets had more or less modeled themselves. The tradition of the five-act form might not obtain in the earliest German drama, as it did not obtain in the Spanish; but it was firmly established in the later German drama, in the English, and in the French. It is easy to see that the later Germans derived it from the French and the English; but where did the French and the English get it? Where could they get it? No such division existed in the medieval drama, in the mysteries and in the miracle-plays, out of which the drama of every modern language has been developed. No such division existed in the Greek drama, which has served as a standard and as a stimulus to the drama of every modern literature. A Greek tragedy was represented without any intermission in a single, long unbroken act; and if a sequence of three plays was sometimes performed, one after another, on the same day, and dealing with successive periods of the same story, this trilogy might suggest a division into three parts. Nor is any hint of the duty of dividing a tragedy into five parts to be discovered anywhere in Aristotle.

II

And yet we must go back to the Greek theater if we want to see why it is that the 'Femmes Savantes' of Molière and the 'School for Scandal' of Sheridan are each of them in five acts. But it is not from a Greek that we get the law that this division was obligatory on all self-respecting dramatists; it is from a Roman,

writing at a time when the drama of his own language had been ousted from the stage by pantomimic spectacle and by gladiatorial combat. It is Horace, who, in his epistle on the art of poetry, declares the necessity of five acts:

> Ne brevior, neu sit quinto productior actu
> Fabula quae posci vult et spectata reponi.

Sir Theodore Martin rendered this in an English rimed couplet, which does not completely convey the meaning of the two Latin lines, but which will serve to show the rigidity of the rule laid down by the Roman poet:

> Five acts a play must have, nor more nor less,
> To keep the stage and have a marked success.

But this still leaves us groping in the dark. Why did Horace declare this law? What warrant had he? What put the idea into his head? These are questions answered by a French scholar, M. Weil; in one of his ingenious and learned 'Études sur le Drame Antique,' he explains that Horace derived much of his theory of the poetic art from the Alexandrian critics, and more particularly from the writings of a certain Neoptolemus of Parium. Probably the Alexandrian authors of tragedy had been led to adopt a division into five acts by following the example of Euripides, whose practise was not uniform, but who tended to reduce to four the number of the lyric odes in his tragedies, thus separating the purely dramatic passages into five parts.

In Athens the drama had been slowly evolved out of the tragic songs; and in the surviving tragedies of Æschylus, the earliest of the three great dramatic poets of Greece, we discover that the choral odes are more abundant than the dialog which carries on the plot. In the extant plays of his mighty successor, Sophocles, the drama is seen emerging triumphant, but the lyrical passages are still frequent and important. In the later pieces of Euripides, the third and most modern of the Attic tragedians, we note that the drama has almost wholly disengaged itself from the lyric out of which it sprang. In Æschylus and in Sophocles the number of choral odes and the number of episodes, of purely dramatic passages in dialog, is never fixed, varying from play to play as the plot might demand. But in Euripides the choral odes are more detached from the drama; beautiful in themselves, they seem to exist rather for their own sake than in any integral relation to the play itself. And apparently Euripides was far more interested in his play, in his plot, and in his characters, than in these extraneous lyric passages, so he reduced them to the lowest possible number, generally to four, serving, so to speak, as exquisite interact music, separating the pathetic play into five episodes in dialog.

The Alexandrian tragedians came long after Euripides, and to their sophisticated taste his pathetic and emotional plays appealed far more than the austerer and manlier masterpieces of his two great predecessors. Apparently they accepted his form as final; they may even have left out the choruses altogether; and

then their tragedies had five separate episodes—in other words, five acts. It is these lost Alexandrian tragedies, composed in the decadent days of the Greek drama, which seem to have served as the model for Seneca, the eloquent rhetorician—even tho he frequently took over the theme and often more or less of the structure of certain of the dramas of Euripides.

The tragedies of Seneca are to be considered rather as dramatic poems than as poetic dramas, since they were intended not really for performance by actors, in a theater, before an audience, but for recitation by a single elocutionist in a private house—much as a professional reader of our own time might recite unaided a more or less dramatic poem by Shelley or Byron or Browning. Coming long after Horace, Seneca unhesitatingly accepted all of the restrictions insisted upon by the Latin lyrist—including the purely academic limitation of the number of speakers taking part in any dialog to three, a limitation absolutely absurd in a poem not intended for actual acting and not forced to conform to the accidental conditions of the Attic stage. Obeying also the other rule which he found in Horace's codification of the laws of dramatic poetry, the Hispano-Roman rhetorician was careful always to cut up his play into five parts. But he saw his profit in retaining the chorus, since this could be made to serve as the appropriate mouthpiece for the elaborate passages of elocutionary splendor in which he delighted.

It is not to be wondered at that the Italian scholars of the Renascence followed the precept of Horace and

the practise of Seneca. They were far more at home in Latin than they were in Greek; and they could hardly help reading into the literature of Athens what they were already familiar with in the authors of Rome. To them Seneca was as imposing as Sophocles, and Horace was almost as weighty as Aristotle. So it is that Scaliger and Minturno prescribe five acts, and that Castelvetro (always more practical in his point of view) points out that poets seem to have found the five-act form most suitable. When an Italian scholar-poet turned from criticism to creation, the tragedies he conscientiously composed obeyed all the rules, and his dramatic poems were as academic as those of Seneca, in that they were intended not for production by professional actors in a regular theater before spectators who had paid their way in, but only for an occasional performance by the author himself assisted by a few of his friends before a little group of cultivated admirers of antiquity, contemptuous of the real public. These soulless dramatic poems, devised for declamation by amateurs before a gathering of dilettants, are now perceived to be merely literary curiosities, having little connection with the real drama made for the regular theater and its myriad-minded body of playgoers.

Just as the Italian dramatic poems were imitations of Seneca, so the French dramatic poems, composed a little later, were imitations of these Italians, and also of Seneca, more or less indirectly. They were the imitations of an imitation, aping the outward form of the drama, but empty of all genuine dramatic spirit, arti-

ficial in passion and high-flown in rhetoric. And there are early English attempts at this same sort of academic tragedy, more imitative still, since we can see in them the commingled influence of the French and of the Italians immediately, and also of the remoter Seneca, whom they revered as the exemplar of true tragedy. Such a play is 'Gorboduc,' belauded by the scholarly Sidney—and even on one occasion acted, by main strength. In all of these imitations, English and French and Italian, we find the stately chorus abounding in lofty rhetoric; and we find also, and always, the division into five acts. But in the folk-theater, which the scholar-poets scorned, and out of which the living drama was to be developed, there is no trace of any division into acts. In the mysteries and the miracle-plays, and in the chronicle-plays which grew out of them, there are numberless episodes, each complete in itself, and never combined artificially into acts. The composer of any one of these folk-dramas conceived his story as a continuous narrative shown in action; and he gave no thought to the number of divisions, of episodes, of separate scenes, or of acts that it might seem to have.

III

Tragedy has ever been held to be more elevated than comedy and more worthy; and comedy has continually accepted the conditions appropriate to tragedy. Since the dignity of tragedy demanded a division into five

acts, comedy was also subjected to the same rule; and this was done in spite of the fact that the plays of Plautus and Terence (composed long before Horace codified his advice to intending poets) were not divided into acts, if we may judge by the earliest of the surviving manuscripts. So it is that we find the scholarly authors of the two earliest of English comedies, 'Ralph Roister Doister' and 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' knowing what was expected of them, and giving the five-act form to both of these amusing plays. But these two comedies, almost contemporary as they are with the academic and undramatic tragedy of 'Gorboduc,' are far superior to it in adaptability for actual performance. They are not intended only to be recited; they can be acted easily and profitably. As we analyze them we see that the structural complexity may be derived from the comic dramas of Plautus and Terence, but that the inner spirit is that of the English folk-theater, of the robust medieval farce-writers, of the unknown humorist who has left us the laughable and veracious scene of Mak and the Shepherds.

Scholars as they were, the authors of these two comedies did not scorn the primitive plays of the plain people of their own time. They did not despise the unpretending folk-drama which was then pleasing the populace; in fact, they took stock of it, and found their profit in so doing. They saw that to be raised up to the level of literature it needed only to be chastened and stiffened. They accepted the living tradition of play-making as it came down to them, and in accord

with this tradition they wrought their humorous fantasies, adding the higher polish and the more adroit plot which they had learned to appreciate in the Latin comic dramatists. They accepted the native play, bare as it was, and they enriched it by bestowing on it as much as it could carry of the finer art of the Romans. Thus it is that the authors of 'Ralph Roister Doister' and of 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' may have pointed out the path of progress to the author of the 'Comedy of Errors,' whereas the authors of 'Gorboduc,' contemptuously rejecting the folk-theater of their own day, and idly copying the classicist imitations of the Italians, thereby relinquished whatever direct influence they might have had upon the growth of tragedy in England.

Both 'Ralph Roister Doister' and 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' were probably written for performance by college boys, and they have not a little of the brisk heartiness and of the broad horse-play to which we are accustomed in the college pieces of to-day. It was for performance at court that Lyly wrote the most of his plays, which lack the vivacity and the liveliness distinguishing the two college comic dramas, but which yet reveal a far better understanding of the drama than was possessed by the authors of 'Gorboduc.' Lyly again is careful to divide his plays into five acts. But his contemporaries Greene and Peele, writing solely for the professional playhouses, were bound by none of the rules which might be expected in college or at court. Whatever their own scholarly equipment, when they wrote for the professional players, they followed

unhesitatingly the traditions of the contemporary theater. As playwrights they were the direct heirs of the anonymous and ignorant devisers of the medieval drama. They had a story to set on the stage; they chose a succession of more or less effective episodes, and they carelessly cast these into dialog, with little thought of form or of construction. Never do their plays contain matter enough for five full acts; and we may be certain that no such framework was ever in the mind of either of these dramatic poets. In the original editions of their pieces we find no separation into acts and scenes; and if this needless and misleading subdivision is found in later editions it is the doing of misguided editors.

In what is accepted as the earliest edition of Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy,' the most widely popular of all the pre-Shaksperian plays, the text is actually divided into four acts. But this division is not structural; it is almost accidental, as tho it was an afterthought, inserted at the last moment into the copy intended for the printer, and never in the mind of the playwright himself when he was preparing the prompt-book for the actors; and Shakspere, who followed Kyd in more ways than one, apparently followed him in this also. In the folio edition of his plays, published after his death, a division into five acts has been made; but the task has not been accomplished any too skilfully—for example, the second act of 'King John' has but eighty lines, and here the division is into four acts only. The suggestion has been proffered that it was, perhaps, left

to the printers to do, the influence of Ben Jonson having been powerful enough to establish the theory that a self-respecting dramatist would never fail to cast his tragedies in the five-act form. It is to be noted also that no division into acts is to be found in the quarto editions published in Shakspere's lifetime; and this is very significant since these quartos seem to have been piratical copies from shorthand notes taken surreptitiously in the theater, thus recording the actual conditions of performance.

It may be doubted whether Shakspere conceived his plays in accordance with any such subdivisions. Some of them, the 'Comedy of Errors' for one, which can be acted in the space of an hour and a quarter, are far too slight for so huge a framework. On the other hand, the several appearances of Chorus punctuate 'Henry V' into five divisions, apparently an intentional conformity to the Horatian rule. Of course, there were generally several intermissions in the Elizabethan performance of a play, altho the resulting divisions were not necessarily five; and it is noteworthy that Shakspere makes Jaques declare that man's life had seven acts.

IV

The fact is that Shakspere was a professional playwright, and that he had no merely academic theories. In composing his plays he followed unhesitatingly the principles that had guided his immediate predecessors. He was seeking ever to give the playgoing public what

it had been accustomed to enjoy in the theater, better in degree, no doubt, but the same in kind. Like these predecessors, he kept to the traditions inherited from the medieval mysteries; and he thought in terms, not of acts and of scenes, as a modern playwright is forced to do, but of a continuous narrative shown in action. In doing so he resembles Herodotus, whose history has also been cut up by later editors, dividing it into nine books, altho, as Professor Bury has reminded us, "such divisions had not yet come into fashion" in the historian's own day. There is no reason to suppose that Shakspere would have approved of the attempt of the editors of the folio to subdivide his plays, each into five acts. There is every reason to suppose that he would have been greatly annoyed if he could have foreseen the way in which later editors have chosen further to chop up the acts into an infinity of scenes.

Nowadays, we have been so accustomed to read Shakspere in one or another of the trim and tidy modern editions, with a wanton division into acts and into scenes, each of which indicates a change of place, and each of which seems to suggest a change of scenery, that it is only by a resolute effort of the will that we are able to shake off the prepossessions derived from this unfortunate and confusing presentation of his text. Probably even to-day a majority of those who enjoy reading Shakspere would be surprised to be told that there is no warrant whatever for these alleged changes of scene, and for these superabundant subdivisions of his story. Many of these readers would be taken

aback by the unexpected discovery that all this cutting up of Shakspere's text was the work of his commentators, with Rowe at the head of the procession. Some of these readers would feel as tho they were deprived of a precious possession, if they had only an edition in which all this useless machinery was swept away.

And yet this is just the edition which is demanded by the present state of Shaksperian scholarship, and which is now made possible by our new understanding of the Elizabethan theater, with its rude platform thrust out into the yard, so different from our modern theaters, in which the stage is withdrawn behind a picture-frame. The Tudor platform-stage is wholly unlike the picture-frame stage of to-day; but it is very like the "pageant," or the scaffold on which the mysteries and miracle-plays were presented. It was to the simple conditions of his semi-medieval theater that Shakspere adjusted himself, rude as those conditions may now appear to us who are accustomed to the sumptuous picturesqueness of our own luxuriant playhouses.

In accepting the theater as he found it, and in availing himself of all its possibilities, such as they were, Shakspere showed his usual common sense. Only by striving to reconstruct for ourselves in our mind's eye, as it were, the playhouse where he plied his trade and earned his living, can we come to any adequate appreciation of his art, of his craftsmanship as a playwright, of his dramaturgic skill. And in any honest effort to understand how his mighty dramas were originally

produced by himself and by his fellow actors in the round O of the wooden Globe Theater, unroofed and unlighted except by the dingy daylight of northern Europe, we need always to keep fast in our mind the fact that all preconceptions are false that may be derived from our memory of latter-day performances in theaters of a type which the Elizabethan dramatists could not foresee, and of which the conditions are often the exact opposite of those they accepted without hesitation. That is to say, the most profitable way to reconstruct mentally the Tudor playhouse is to banish from our minds every impression made by our modern theater, with its elaborate complexity, and to study out for ourselves the simple circumstances of performance in the Middle Ages. And as a first step toward the proper standpoint, we must cast out our traditional belief that Shakspere always accepted the classicist formula of five acts, proclaimed by Horace, and employed by Seneca. That he did use it in one or two plays seems indisputable, and he may very well have employed it in a few others, but there is no reason to suppose that he would have submitted himself any more willingly to the rule of five acts than he did to the rule of the three unities.

It may be doubted also whether not a few dramatists, writing later than Shakspere, would not have done well to claim the liberty he and Lope de Vega chose to exercise at will. Racine, for one, had sadly to stretch his 'Athalie' to fill out the five-act framework which he had blindly accepted, altho he had earlier limited

'Esther' to three acts. Schiller, for another, would have gained a swifter compactness for his play if he had left out the needless fifth act of his 'William Tell' and rolled his fourth act into his third. Victor Hugo had to manufacture a fourth act for his 'Ruy Blas,' so slightly related to his main story that it was cut out of the English adaptation acted by Fechter and Booth. Ibsen, it may be added, composed his first tragedy, 'Catiline,' in three acts, altho it was in blank verse, thus early revealing his characteristic independence of tradition.

(1907.)

P. S.—Since this paper was written I have found two opinions as to the number of acts a play ought to have which were unknown to me when I undertook the discussion. The first is in the 'Dasarupa,' the Hindu treatise on the craft of play-making: "There are five stages of the action which is set on foot by those that strive after a result: Beginning, Effort, Prospect of Success, Certainty of Success, Attainment of the Result."

The second is in the commentary made by Robert Louis Stevenson during his methodical perusal of the dramas of the elder Dumas. After reading 'Henri III et sa Cour,' Stevenson declares that here in Dumas's first piece "is the cloven foot; a fourth act that has no part or lot in the play; a fourth act that is a mere incubus and interruption—that takes the eye off the action, and between two spirited and palpitating scenes

interjects a damned sermon on the history of France. Poor Tribonian had a sore job to make up the fifty books of the Pandects; what was that to the labor of a dramatist bent on filling his five acts? I go as far as this: the natural division of the normal play is four: Act I, exposition; Act II, the problem produced; Act III, the problem argued; Act IV, the way out of it."

(1916.)

V

DRAMATIC COLLABORATION

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I

It is a significant fact that whenever and wherever the drama has flourished most abundantly and most luxuriantly, we are certain to find a tendency to collaboration, to the partnership of two authors in the composition of one play. In England in the spacious days of good Queen Bess, there is not only the famous association of Beaumont and Fletcher, but also a host of other more or less temporary combinations, Fletcher with Shakspere and Massinger, Dekker with Ben Jonson and with Middleton. In Spain Lope de Vega joined forces with Montalvan and with others. In France in the seventeenth century Molière, once at least called to his aid Corneille and Quinault; and in France again in the nineteenth century we find Augier working with Sandeau and with Foussier, Scribe working with Legouvé, and with a score of others, while Dumas the elder was encompassed by a cloud of collaborators, and Dumas the younger was willing on more than one occasion to join various writers in the plays which he included in the separate volumes of his works, called by him the 'Théâtre des Autres.' Then also in France there was the long-continued alliance of Meilhac and Halévy, to which we owe 'Froufrou' and

the 'Grand Duchess of Gérolstein'; and there was also the almost equally interesting association of MM. Caillavet and de Flers. Sardou had one ally in the composition of 'Divorçons,' and another in the composition of 'Madame Sans Gêne.' In Great Britain in recent years we have seen Sir James Barrie and Sir Arthur Pinero unite in writing a book for music; Mr. Bennett and Mr. Knoblauch unite in writing 'Milestones'; Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. Laurence Housman unite in writing 'Prunella.' And in the United States there was a score of years ago the steady collaboration of Mr. Belasco with the late H. C. De Mille, to which we owe the 'Charity Ball' and the 'Wife'; and more recently Mr. Belasco also has collaborated with Mr. John Luther Long in writing 'Madame Butterfly,' and the 'Darling of the Gods.' Mr. Augustus Thomas was once the partner of Mr. Clay Greene; Mr. Bronson Howard composed one of his latest plays, 'Peter Stuyvesant, Governor of New Amsterdam,' in association with another American man of letters; and Mr. Booth Tarkington and Mr. Harry Leon Wilson were the co-authors of the 'Man from Home' and of half a dozen other pieces.

While this prevalence of the practise of collaboration in periods of dramatic productivity is significant, it is equally significant that there is no corresponding prevalence of the practise of collaboration in novel-writing. True it is that there are certain fairly well-known partnerships in the history of prose fiction—that of Erckmann-Chatrain, in French, for instance, and that

of Besant and Rice in English. True it is that Dickens and Wilkie Collins were joint authors of 'No Thorofare,' and that Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner were joint authors of the 'Gilded Age.' True it is also, that novels have been written not only by two partners, but by what can fairly be described as a syndicate of associated authors, the 'King's Men' by four, 'Six of One and Half a Dozen of the Other' by six, and the 'Whole Family' by twelve (including Mr. Howells and Mr. Henry James, Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Doctor Henry van Dyke). These freakish conglomerates are sporadic only; they seem to be little better than literary "stunts"; and even the union of two writers in the production of a single novel is far less frequently to be observed than the union of two writers in the production of a single play. The former is unusual, whereas the latter seems to be so common as to excite no comment.

Now, there must be a reason for this difference. If the playwrights find it advantageous to double up, and the novelists do not discover any profit in putting on double harness, there ought to be some evident explanation. When we consider more carefully the essentially different conditions of the art of prose fiction and the art of play-writing, it is not difficult to perceive fairly obvious reasons for the varying procedure of the practitioners of these rival arts, which may seem so much alike, but which are really so very different in their methods and in their possibilities.

The French critic Joubert once asserted that "to

make in advance an exact and detailed plan is to deprive one's intellect of all the pleasures of novelty and chance meeting during its execution; it is to make this execution insipid, and in consequence impossible, in works calling for enthusiasm and imagination." This is an overstatement—but it is not a misstatement—of a principle of composition which is fundamentally sound in the writing of prose fiction, but which is fundamentally unsound in the writing of plays. The drama demands a well-built story, artfully put together, while a novel need not have a coherent and compact plot. Some great novels, Fielding's 'Tom Jones' for one, and Turgenef's 'Smoke' for another, have each of them a beautifully articulated structure, and so has Mr. Howells's 'Rise of Silas Lapham,' to take a later example. But other great novels are frankly more or less haphazard in their movement, the 'Pickwick Papers,' for instance, and 'Tartarin on the Alps,' and 'Huckleberry Finn.' And it is not too much to say that only a very few novels attain to the severity of structure, the regularity of action, the straightforward, unswerving movement which we discover in the dramas of a corresponding rank, and which can be achieved only by making in advance the exact and detailed plan that Joubert held to be fatal in works calling for enthusiasm and imagination.

Of course, the drama can utilize enthusiasm and imagination quite as often and quite as abundantly as can prose fiction, but it must use these precious gifts with a discretion which is not imposed upon its

rival. In a novel enthusiastic imagination may lure the story-teller into a host of by-paths not foreseen by him when he set out on his journey; and while he is adventuring himself in these by-paths, he may chance to encounter characters of a diverting or an appealing personality, whom it may amuse him to delineate, and whom the readers of his book will be glad to welcome. But in a drama the story-teller is debarred from these wanderings from the straight and narrow road, and he must, perforce, control his enthusiastic imagination, compelling it to do its work within the rigid limits of the artfully devised framework of the plot.

In other words, character is all-important in prose fiction, and the ultimate fame of the novelist depends upon his power of endowing his creatures with life, and upon his ability to let them obey the laws of their being before our eyes. This must the playwright also achieve; but he has the added duty of relating his characters intimately to the main action of his drama. Now, the novelist is under no obligation of this sort; he appeals not to a crowd seated before a stage, but to the solitary reader in the study; and experience shows that solitary readers do not insist upon the solidity of structure in a novel which the same individuals desire and demand when they betake themselves to the theater. The novel-reader may be satisfied by characters who do not know their own minds, and who are merely exhibited and put through their paces, without having any vital relation to the story, even if there is anything which can fairly be called a story—and in

some novels of high repute, in Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey,' for example, and in Anatole France's 'Histoire Contemporaine,' each of them extending over several volumes, there is little or no story, no main thread, no pretense of a plot.

II

Here, then, is the fatal difference between a novel and a play; a novel may have a plot, but a plot is not necessary, and it can get along with a minimum of story; whereas a play must have a plot, skilfully articulated, even if the skeleton is beautifully covered; it must have a story peopled by persons knowing their own minds, a story set in action by a dominating will, which determines the successive episodes of the action. As the making of a plot, as the putting together of a supporting skeleton of action, calls for dexterity of workmanship, for ingenuity of resource, for adroitness of construction, for the most careful consideration of the means whereby the end is to be obtained, two heads are often better than one, because the partners have to talk the thing out to its uttermost details before they decide upon the straight line which is the shortest distance between two points. The technic of play-making is more exacting than the technic of novel-writing, and it requires imperatively the exact and detailed plan which Joubert held to be hampering to enthusiasm and imagination. Scott, for example, as he tells us himself, began more than one of his novels

not knowing what he was going to put into it, and not knowing from day to day, as he was writing, what his ultimate goal would be. But no playwright, however happy-go-lucky in his tendencies, has ever dared to begin a play before he knew with absolute certainty how he intended to end it. In the drama we insist upon a straightforward and unswerving action; the end is implied in the beginning, and the beginning is only what that end makes necessary.

As the technic of the drama is exacting, it needs to be acquired by a period of apprenticeship; and here is another of the indisputable advantages of collaboration. The more inexperienced of the two collaborators is taken into the studio, so to speak, of the more expert, and he thereby learns the secrets of stage-craft in the best possible way, by applying them under the direction, or at the suggestion and by the advice, of an older practitioner, to whom they have become so familiar that they are a second nature, as it were.

Collaboration is the best conceivable school for young playwrights. It is impossible to overestimate the influence of Scribe's multiplied collaborations upon the drama of France in the mid-years of the nineteenth century; and almost as potent, because almost as widespread, was the influence of the many collaborations of the elder Dumas. Most of those who were the temporary partners of Scribe and Dumas were subdued to their more powerful associate, and contributed little or nothing beyond their fundamental suggestions for the several plays, and their incidental suggestions as

to details of the working-out. That is to say, most of the plays signed by Scribe and Dumas in partnership with others have a close similarity to the plays they signed alone. But from this generalization we may except 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' and 'Bataille de Dames,' in which Scribe had Legouvé for a partner, and in which we find a greater richness of character delineation than in any of the pieces that Scribe composed alone, as we find also a greater dexterity of construction than in any of the pieces that Legouvé composed alone.

To the fact that 'Milestones' was written by Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. Edward Knoblauch in conjunction, and to the friendly discussion due to their working together, we may credit the superior stage-effectiveness of this play over the 'Kismet,' which Mr. Knoblauch wrote alone, and over the 'Great Adventure,' for which Mr. Bennett was solely responsible. To the composition of 'Milestones' each of these two authors, the American and the Englishman, brought his special qualifications, each of them not only stimulating but supplementing the other. So we find the most famous French comedy of the nineteenth century, the 'Gendre de M. Poirier,' a better piece of work, more equably balanced than any play written alone by either Augier or Sandeau.

It is scarcely necessary to say that there is little profit in a partnership for play-making when both of the associates are equally inexpert, or when they were both possessed of wrong notions about the art of the drama. In the former case we have the blind leading

the blind, and the most lamentable example of this is the long forgotten 'Ah Sin,' which Bret Harte and Mark Twain combined to compose that C. T. Parsloe could impersonate the Heathen Chinee. In the latter case we have not only the blind leading the blind, but a perverseness in going the wrong way, intensified by the complete sympathy between the two associates; and the most lamentable example of this is the 'Deacon Brodie' of Robert Louis Stevenson and William Ernest Henley, who not only were ignorant of the modern technic of the drama, but who ignored it of set purpose, deliberately going up a blind alley despite the plain sign that there was no thorofare.

III

Yet Stevenson, at least, perceived clearly enough what ought to be the more evident advantages of collaboration, that it focused "two minds together on the stuff," thus producing "an extraordinarily greater richness of purview, consideration, and invention." Collaboration will probably always produce a greater richness of invention, since each of the partners is likely to stimulate the other, their two minds striking sparks like flint and steel. But it can produce a greater richness of consideration only when each is willing both to yield and to oppose. Neither must yield too easily; each of them must stand out for his own suggestions; and each of them must insist on weighing and measuring the suggestions of his ally. If they are too sympa-

thetic, if their two hearts beat as one, then the advantage of their having two heads is diminished. If the two partners always think alike, then there will be no greater richness of purview.

When a play composed by two of his friends failed to find the success on the stage which had been anticipated for it, Mr. Augustus Thomas made the shrewd remark that the two authors had probably been "too polite to each other"—that is to say, that they had not insisted upon criticising the successive suggestions made by each in turn. On the other hand, the collaborators must be broad-minded enough not to resent this necessary criticism. Like any other partnership, collaboration is a ticklish experiment, and it can be profitable only when the two partners are willing to give and take. They need more than usual self-control; they must be able, each of them, to preserve his own self-respect while full of regard for the self-respect of the other. It is not surprising that the long collaborations of Erckmann-Chatrain and of Meilhac and Halévy finally came to a sudden end because of an abrupt quarrel. That disagreement is likely to arise out of the discussions inherent in any profitable literary partnership is evidenced by a retort credited to the younger Dumas, who was a rather authoritative partner, and who did not always succeed in keeping on good terms with those whose plays he had bettered. A friend once suggested a theme for a play, and invited the collaboration of Dumas. "But why should I wish to quarrel with you?" was answer of the witty dramatist.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of self-control in all the long history of collaboration is that of Théodore Barrière, the author of the once-famous play called the 'Marble Heart,' one of the latest of whose pieces (adapted by Augustin Daly as 'Alixe') was composed in collaboration with his mother-in-law!

Sometimes the breach between the two partners is postponed until after the play is completed and produced. Charles Reade and Tom Taylor joined forces in the composition of the long-popular comedy called 'Masks and Faces,' and after it had established itself upon the stage, Charles Reade took its plot and its characters and utilized them in his charming novel, 'Peg Woffington,' and as he had taken the liberty of thus making a private profit out of the property of the partnership, it is not to be wondered at that Tom Taylor was distinctly displeased. But Charles Reade, altho he collaborated with Tom Taylor, with Paul Merritt, and with Dion Boucicault, was more or less deficient in the courtesy and consideration that a man ought to possess to fit him for partnership. When he allied himself with Dion Boucicault in the writing of the novel of 'Foul Play,' the collaborators quarreled so violently that they felt themselves justified in preparing rival dramatizations of the story they had written in conjunction, so that London playgoers had the opportunity of choosing between two different theatrical adaptations of the same tale.

When the two partners are courteous to each other but not too yielding, when they are sympathetic but

not too much alike in their characteristics and qualifications, when each of them supplements the weaker points of the other, then collaboration ought to result in plays of more variety of invention, and of more ingenuity of construction than is likely to be possessed by the average play due to a single mind. This much must be admitted; and it is the final justification for collaboration. But altho these partnerships in playmaking spread abroad a knowledge of the principles of the art, and altho they raise the probable value of the average play, it must be admitted also, and with equal frankness, that the possibilities of collaboration are sharply limited.

No single one of the mightiest masterpieces of dramatic literature, ancient and modern, is to be credited to collaboration; and the only possible exception to this sweeping statement would be urged by the critics who hold that the 'Gendre de M. Poirier' of Augier and Sandeau is the masterpiece of French comedy in the nineteenth century. Those who have climbed to the loftiest height of dramatic art have always done so alone, sustained by enthusiasm and supported by imagination. In spite of the greater "richness of purview, consideration, and invention" that collaboration undoubtedly bestows, the man of surpassing genius, the great master of the drama, Sophocles or Shakspere or Molière, works best alone. It is true that he may now and again take to himself an ally, as Shakspere condescended to the assistance of Fletcher in 'Henry VIII,' and as Molière invoked the aid of Corneille in

'Psyché,' but it is true also that these plays, written in collaboration by Shakspere and by Molière, are not the plays which establish and confirm their fame. Indeed, these plays are not even among the more important pieces of Shakspere and Molière, and the reputation of the authors would be no lower if these plays had never come into existence.

It is by the comedies and tragedies which Shakspere wrote alone that the Elizabethan stage is made glorious, and not by the dramatic romances that go under the joint names of Beaumont and Fletcher. It is by the lyrical melodramas of which Victor Hugo was sole author that we recall the Romanticist revolt in the French theater in 1830, and immediately thereafter, and not by the perfervidly passionate pieces that the elder Dumas put together in partnership with a group of now-forgotten auxiliaries. It is by the comedies that Augier and the younger Dumas wrote, each of them expressing himself in his own fashion, that the drama of France is illumined a score or more years later, and not by the comedies in the composition of which Scribe had the aid of an army of allies.

In any period of abundant fertility we can observe growing together at the same time from the soil, a fairly large number of trees rising above the underbrush, and we can also perceive here and there a tree of conspicuous eminence towering above these clumps of average height. In the luxuriant forest of the drama many of the trees of average height may be ticketed with two names, but the monarchs of the

wood, those whose tops lift themselves high above their neighbors—these will be found to bear only single signature.

(1914.)

VI

THE DRAMATIZATION OF NOVELS AND THE NOVELIZATION OF PLAYS

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I

In Professor Bliss Perry's admirably suggestive 'Study of Prose Fiction,' he devotes one chapter to a careful consideration of the essential distinctions between prose fiction and the drama, in which he makes it plain that "the novel and the play are not merely two different modes of communicating the same fact or truth," because "the different modes of presentation really result in the communication of a different fact." Professor Perry declares that the field of the dramatist is marked off from that of the novelist "by the nature of the artistic medium which each man employs," and he asserts that the choice of a medium for presenting his story and projecting his characters "depends wholly upon the personality and training of the artist and the nature of the fact or truth that he wishes to convey to the public." And he sums up by insisting that "a novel is typically as far removed from a play as a bird is from a fish, and that any attempt to transform one into the other is apt to result in a sort of flying-fish, a betwixt-and-between thing—capable, indeed, of both swimming and flying, but good at neither." In other words, a dramatized novel or a novelized play is an

attempt to breed an amphibious creature which, as the Irishman once defined it, "can't live on the land, and dies in the water."

The difference between the novel and the play is due to the inexorable fact that one is intended to be read alone in the study, and that the other is intended to be seen on the stage by a crowd; it ought to be obvious to all who care to consider the question, and yet there are many who fail to grasp the distinction, deceived by the illusive but superficial similarities between the two forms, each of which contains a story carried on by characters who take part in dialogs. And as a result of this failure to apprehend the vital differences between the two types of story-telling, the narrative to be perused and the action to be witnessed, our theaters have long been invaded by dramatized novels, and our book-stores are now being besieged by novelized plays. In many cases, if not in most of them, the motive for the transformation is simply commercial; and in view of the immediate gain to be garnered, the artistic disadvantages of the procedure are overlooked. If hundreds of thousands of readers have found pleasure in following the footsteps of a fascinating heroine thru the pages of a prose fiction, it is possible always that hundreds of thousands of spectators may be lured to behold her adventures when they are set forth anew in a stage-play. And if a compelling plot has drawn audiences night after night into the theater, it is possible again that this plot may attract book-buyers in equal numbers when it is retold

in a narrative for the benefit of those remote from the playhouse, or reluctant to risk themselves within its portals. Managers are ready to tempt the novelist with the hope of a second crop of fame and fortune, and publishers dangle the same golden bait before the eyes of the dramatist.

Altho this effort to kill two birds with one stone is more frequent of late than it used to be, it is not at all new—indeed it existed before the rise of prose fiction. The dramatic poets of Greece borrowed episodes from the earliest epic poets. Centuries later Shakspere laid violent hands on Italian tales and on English romances. On the other hand, while it must be admitted that the dramatizing of novels has been far more prevalent in the past than the novelizing of plays, this latter practise, suddenly popular in the twentieth century, was not unknown in the centuries that preceded ours. For example, Le Sage levied upon the Spanish playwrights for many of the characters and the situations he needed, for his rambling, picaresque novels, 'Gil Blas' and its sister stories. Another illustration can be found in England earlier than any in France; and before the play of 'Pericles,' which Shakspere seems to have edited and improved, was printed and perhaps even before it was performed, it was novelized by an obscure writer named Wilkins, who was very probably the author of the original version of the straggling piece that Shakspere revised. Thru the long years prose fiction and the drama have struggled with each other for the favor of the public, and each of them has always been

willing to borrow from its rival whenever it found material fitted for its own special purpose.

II

But altho the dramatizing of novels was less uncommon a century or two ago than the novelizing of plays, neither was frequent and neither of them was in any way prohibited by law. That is to say, the novel and the play were held to be so different that the novelist could not prevent the dramatist from borrowing his stories, and the playwright could not forbid the writer of prose fiction from taking over his plots. Even the dramatizing of novels was so uncommon that the earlier story-tellers were not moved to protest when they saw their fictions employed by the playwrights; in fact, they were often inclined to accept this as a compliment to their original invention. Marmontel, for instance, in the preface to a late edition of his 'Moral Tales,' pointed with pride to the fact that one of these prose narratives had been turned into a play, and suggested complacently that there were other stories in his collection worthy of the same fate. Tennyson borrowed the story of his 'Dora' from Miss Mitford; and Charles Reade had no scruple in making a play out of Tennyson's poem. It must be admitted that Reade's attitude was rather inconsistent, for he writhed in pain when one of his own novels was cut into dialog and put on the stage without his permission, and yet he himself made plays out of novels by Anthony Trollope

and by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett without asking their leave, and without heed to their subsequent protests against his high-handed proceeding. Apparently, when he was the aggressor he thought that he was doing a service to his victims.

When Reade was guilty of this offense against the developing literary morals of the nineteenth century, he was probably within his legal rights, since the British law had not then advanced to the point of recognizing the author's complete ownership of the fiction he had created. This defect has been remedied at last, and in the existing copyright and stage-right legislation of Great Britain and the United States authors are assumed to reserve to themselves every privilege which they do not specifically deprive themselves of; and they need no longer announce that they desire to retain all rights for their own profit. Both in the British code and in the American the novelist has now the sole privilege of making a play out of his story, and the dramatist has the sole privilege of making a novel out of his play. *Dramatization* is a word of respectable antiquity, and the corresponding word, *novelization*, has now been legally recognized as a distinctive term. The authors had felt a wrong when others could legally make money out of a plot they had invented; and they asserted a moral right to control their own works whatever might be the form of presentation. The progress of legal reform was slow, as it usually is, but it was also certain. The moral right has now become a legal right of which the original author may avail himself or not,

as he pleases. He may, if he chooses, dramatize his own novel and novelize his own play; or, if he prefers, he can sell the permission to rehandle his material to a professional playwright or to a professional story-teller.

III

There is one peculiar distinction between the novel and the play which Professor Bliss Perry did not emphasize. A novel may please long, and please many when it is only a study of character, like the 'Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard' of M. Anatole France, or when it is only the record of a series of adventures and misadventures passing before the eyes of the chief personage, like the 'Huckleberry Finn' of Mark Twain. A play, on the other hand, is likely to fail to please audiences in the theater unless it sets before the spectators a clearly defined struggle, a conflict of desires, a stark assertion of the human will. That is to say, the drama must deal with a struggle, and the novel need not. The drama must be dynamic and the novel may be static—if these scientific terms may be employed without pedantry. Therefore, while any play may be novelized, with more or less chance of pleasing its new public, if the task is skilfully accomplished, only those novels can be successfully dramatized which happen to present an essential struggle and to display the collision of contending volitions. Any dramatization of the 'Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard' or of 'Huckleberry

Finn,' of 'Gil Blas' or of the 'Pickwick Papers,' is foredoomed to failure, for these prose fictions do not contain the stuff out of which a vital play could be made. But 'Jane Eyre,' for example, and the 'Tale of Two Cities,' and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' do possess this necessary dramatic element, and they can be made into plays with a prospect of pleasing audiences in the theater.

Even when the novel chances to have the essential struggle which the drama demands, the task of adapting it to the stage is not so easy as the non-expert supposes. At first sight it may seem as if there ought to be very little difficulty in turning a novel into a play. There is a story ready-made, situations in abundance, and characters endowed with the breath of life. Yet as a matter of fact, it is harder to make a play out of a novel than it is to write an original play. The immediate danger before the theatrical adapter is that he may be tempted to serve up the story merely as a panorama of successive episodes instead of casting out resolutely everything, however good in itself, which does not bear directly upon the fundamental conflict. This is one reason why the novelist had better leave the work of dramatization to an experienced playwright, who will ruthlessly omit many an episode that the story-teller could not bring himself to discard. In fact, it is hard even for the expert adapter to disentangle the special situations of a novel which alone are available in a play, and he is often tempted to retain much that he had better leave out.

Perhaps it is not too daring a paradox to suggest

that a prose fiction is most likely to be made into a good play when the playwright has not read the book he is dramatizing, but has only been told the story, so that he is free to handle the situations afresh in accord with the conditions of dramatic art, and free to discard the special developments chosen by the novelist in accord with the very different conditions of narrative art. The best version of Mrs. Henry Wood's 'East Lynne' is the French play, 'Miss Multon,' by Adolphe Belot and Eugène Nus; and neither of the French collaborators knew any more about the English novel than its bare story, which was told to one of them by a French actress, who could read English. Now and again a clever playwright, even when he has the disadvantage of complete familiarity with the novel, can break loose from it and yet preserve its full flavor; and this is what Mr. George M. Cohan was able to do in the play wherein he presented the leading characters of Mr. George Randolph Chester's 'Get-Rich-Quick-Wallingford' in a set of situations very different from those in the original story.

Thus we see that only a few novels are really fit to be dramatized, and that even these are often dramatized ineffectively because the playwright has followed the story-teller too closely instead of putting the plot back into solution, so to speak, and letting it recrystallize in dramatic form. The novelizer has a larger liberty since every play contains a story and characters capable of being transferred to prose fiction. But his task has its equivalent danger, and the writer of the

narrative may be content merely to tread in the footsteps of the dramatist, and to do no more than write out more amply the dialog and the stage business, instead of reconceiving the plot afresh to tell it more in accord with the divergent principles of the art of prose fiction. The limitations of time to "the two hours' traffic of the stage" compel the dramatist to extreme compression; his dialogs must be far compacter and more pregnant than is becoming in the more leisurely novel, where the author can take all the time there is. Moreover, the playwright often does no more than allude to episodes which it would profit the novelist to present in detail to his readers; and the adroit novelizer will be quick to seize upon hints of this sort to amplify into chapters containing interesting material for which the original play supplied only the most summary suggestion.

IV

The novelizing of plays is frequent and profitable in America in these early years of the twentieth century; and it had been attempted infrequently even in the seventeenth century. Yet only one of these novelized plays has succeeded in winning an honorable place for itself in prose fiction. This is the charming tale of theatrical life in the eighteenth century, 'Peg Woffington,' which Charles Reade made out of the comedy of 'Masks and Faces,' written by him in collaboration with Tom Taylor. Reade took the liberty of novel-

izing this comedy without asking Taylor's permission, and even without consulting his collaborator; and all the comment that need be made is that the procedure was truly characteristic of Reade's lordly attitude toward others—an attitude taken by him on many other occasions. But whatever injustice he did to his fellow worker, he did none to the joint product of their invention; he transmuted a play into a novel with due appreciation of the demands of the other art, and he produced a fascinating tale with a fascinating heroine, which has been read by thousands who have had no suspicion that Peg Woffington had originally figured in a comedy.

Charles Reade was able to accomplish this feat because he was more skilful as a novelist than as a dramatist, altho he fancied himself rather as a maker of plays than as a writer of stories. More than once did he attempt to repeat this early success in winning two prizes with the same horse. He took the 'Pauvres de Paris' of Brisebarre and Nus—the same play which Dion Boucicault had adapted as the 'Streets of New York'—and made a version which he called 'Gold,' under which name it had a few performances. He had materially modified the French plot in his English play; and he got still further away from Brisebarre and Nus, when he novelized 'Gold,' and called it 'Hard Cash,' a matter-of-fact romance. Later he dramatized this novel of his, and the resulting play did not bear any close resemblance to the 'Pauvres de Paris.'

Reade also collaborated a few years later with Henry

Pettitt in a piece called 'Singleheart and Doubleface,' which he promptly proceeded to novelize—again without consulting his partner. For this indelicacy, swift vengeance followed, as the British novel, being then unprotected by copyright in the United States, was immediately dramatized by Messrs. George H. Jessop and William Gill. It may be noted here casually that another of Reade's romances, 'White Lies,' afterward dramatized by him, had been originally novelized from a French play called the 'Château de Grantier,' written by Auguste Maquet (the ally of Dumas in the 'Three Guardsmen' and 'Monte Cristo'). It is not a little surprising that a man like Reade, who prided himself on his originality, and who even went so far as to accuse George Eliot of stealing his thunder, should have been willing to call so frequently on the aid of collaborators, and to derive so much of his material from foreign sources.

The only other author who has ventured to turn a play into a novel, and then back into a play varying widely from the original piece, is Sir James Barrie, and what he did was not quite what Reade had done. Sir James wrote a charming story, called the 'Little White Bird,' and he found in his own prose fiction part of the material out of which he was moved later to make a charming play, called 'Peter Pan.' For reasons best known to himself, but deplored by all who are interested in the progress of the English drama, Sir James Barrie has chosen to publish only a few of his comedies. Yet he met the demands of a multitude of readers by

borrowing from his fantastic piece a part of the material which he made into a delightful tale, called 'Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens.' These successive rehandlings of an idea, first in prose fiction, then in dramatic form, and finally again in prose fiction, were possible only to a novelist who was also a dramatist—to an author who had mastered the secrets of two different methods of story-telling, the method of the theater and the method of the library.

V

The novelist-dramatist of this type is a comparatively new figure in literature. Formerly there was a sharp line of cleavage between the man who wrote novels and the man who wrote plays, altho one or the other might be lured on occasion into a sporadic raid into the territory of the other. During three-quarters of the nineteenth century prose fiction reigned supreme in every modern literature except that of France, and the novelists were rather inclined to look down on the playwrights, and to dismiss the drama as an inferior form, likely to be absolutely superseded by prose fiction. But toward the end of the century there began to be visible signs of an awakening interest in the drama, and also of a slackening interest in prose fiction. The novelists of the twentieth century, so far from holding the drama to be an inferior form, are discovering that it is at least a more difficult form, and therefore artistically more attractive. As a result of this discovery not

a few novelists have turned playwrights, taking the pains to learn the principles of the more dangerous art of play-making. Sir James Barrie in England, M. Paul Hervieu in France, Herr Sudermann in Germany, and Signor d'Annunzio in Italy may not have abandoned altogether the prose fiction in which they first won fame, but at least they now devote the major part of their energies to the drama. It may be recalled that Clyde Fitch began his literary career as a writer of short stories, and that Mr. Bernard Shaw originally emerged to view as the author of a novel.

On the other hand, it must be noted as significant that the playwrights are not tempted to turn novelists; they seem to be satisfied with their own art as the more exacting, and therefore the more interesting. M. Rostand and M. Maeterlinck, Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. William Gillette and Mr. Augustus Thomas have not been lured from the drama into prose fiction. The novel is a loose form which makes only lax demands on its practitioners, and which does not require an artist always to do his best. The play has a severe technic, and it tolerates no carelessness of construction. The more gifted a story-teller may be, and the more artistic, the more probable it is that in the immediate future he will seek to express himself in the drama, even if he is also moved now and again to return to the easier path of prose fiction.

And this raises another interesting point. Now that the drama is rising again into rivalry with prose fiction, is not the playwright who allows his piece to

be novelized a traitor to his cause? Is he not, in fact, confessing that he esteems the play inferior to the novel? Apparently this is the attitude taken by the more prominent dramatists of the day; most of them publish their plays to be read, and few of them allow these plays to be novelized—altho they might find a superior profit if they descended to this. It is an unfortunate fact that the public which is eager to read prose fiction is not so eager to read the drama. In the dearth of dramatic literature in our language during the nineteenth century, the public lost the habit of reading plays, a habit possessed by the public of the eighteenth century before the vogue of the novel had been established in consequence of the overwhelming popularity of Scott, followed speedily by that of Dickens and Thackeray.

Yet there are signs that the general reader is slowly recovering the ability to find pleasure in the perusal of a play. The social dramas of Ibsen have, most of them, been performed here and there in the theaters of Great Britain and the United States; but they have been read by thousands who have had no opportunity to see them on the stage. So it is with the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw, most of which have also appeared in our playhouses. So it is with the plays of M. Maeterlinck, only a few of which have been produced in the American theater. In time, it seems highly probable that the reading public will extend as glad a welcome to a play by Mr. Galsworthy or by Mr. Booth Tarkington as to one of their novels. But this happy

state can be brought about only if the dramatists resolutely refrain from novelizing their plays themselves, and from authorizing novelization by others.

(1913.)

VII

WOMEN DRAMATISTS

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I

To some of the more ardent advocates of the theory that women are capable of rivaling men in every one of the arts it is a little surprising, not to say disconcerting, that there are so few female playwrights. The drama is closely akin to the novel, since it is another form of story-telling; and in the telling of stories women have been abundantly productive from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. And as performers on the stage women have achieved indisputable eminence; in fact, acting is probably the earliest of the arts (as possibly it is still the only one) in which women have won their way to the very front rank; and in the nineteenth century there were two tragic actresses, Mrs. Siddons and Rachel, certainly not inferior in power and in elevation to the most distinguished of tragic actors. Why is it, then, that women story-tellers have not thrust themselves thru the open stage door to become more effective competitors of the men playwrights?

Before considering this question, it may be well to record that women playwrights have appeared sporadically both in French literature and in English. In France Madeleine Béjart, whose sister Molière married,

was credited with the authorship of more than one play; and in the last hundred years George Sand and Mme. de Girardin brought out comedies and dramas, several of which succeeded in establishing themselves in the repertory of the Comédie-Française. In England at one time or another plays of an immediate popularity were produced by Mrs. Aphra Behn, Mrs. Centlivre, and Mrs. Inchbald; and in America Mrs. Bateman's 'Self,' and Mrs. Mowatt's 'Fashion' held the stage for several seasons, while few of recent successes in the New York theaters had a more delightful freshness or a more alluring fantasy than Mrs. Gates's 'Poor Little Rich Girl,' and few of them have dealt more boldly with a burning question than Miss Ford's 'Polygamy.' These examples of woman's competence to compose plays with vitality enough to withstand the ordeal by fire before the footlights are evidence that if there exists any prejudice against the female dramatist it can be overcome. They are evidence, also, that women are not debarred from the competition; and fairness requires the record here that, when Mr. Winthrop Ames proffered a prize for an American play, this was awarded to a woman.

But to grant equality of opportunity is not to confer equality of ability, and when we call the roll of the dramatists who have given luster to French literature and to English, we discover that this list is not enriched by the name of any woman. The fame of George Sand is not derived from her contributions to dramatic literature, and the contributions of Mrs.

Behn, Mrs. Centlivre, and Mrs. Inchbald, of Mrs. Bateman and Mrs. Mowatt, entitle them to take rank only among the minor playwrights of their own generations; and to say this is to say that their plays are now familiar only to devoted specialists in the annals of the stage, and that the general reader could not give the name of a single piece from the pen of any one of these enterprising ladies. In other words, the female playwrights are so few and so unimportant that a conscientious historian of either French or English dramatic literature might almost neglect them altogether without seriously invalidating his survey. Perhaps the only English titles that are more than mere items in a barren catalog are Mrs. Centlivre's 'Wonder' and Mrs. Cowley's 'Belle's Stratagem'; and the French pieces of female authorship which might protest against exclusion are almost as few—Mme. de Girardin's 'La Joie fait Peur,' and George Sand's 'Marquis de Villemer' and 'Mariage de Victorine.'

Indeed, the women playwrights of the past and of the present might be two or three times more numerous than they are, and two or three times more important without even treading upon the heels of the male playmakers. This is an incontrovertible fact; yet it is equally indisputable that as performers in the theater women are competitors whom men respect and with whom they have to reckon, and that as story-tellers women are as popular and as prolific as men. And here we are brought back again to the question with which this inquiry began: Why is it then that women have

not been as popular and as prolific in telling stories on the stage? Why cannot they write a play as well as they can act in it?

One answer to this question has been volunteered by a woman who succeeded as an actress, and who did not altogether fail as a dramatic poetess, altho she came in later life to have little esteem for her earlier attempts at play-writing. It is in her 'Records of a Girlhood' that Fanny Kemble expressed the conviction that it was absolutely impossible for a woman ever to be a great dramatist, because "her physical organization" was against it. "After all, it is great nonsense saying that intellect is of no sex. The brain is, of course, of the same sex as the rest of the creature; beside the original female nature, the whole of our training and education, our inevitable ignorance of common life and general human nature, and the various experiences of existence from which we are debarred with the most sedulous care, is insuperably against it" —that is, against the possibility of a really searching tragedy, or of a really liberal comedy ever being composed by a woman. To this rather sweeping denial of of the dramaturgic gift to women Fanny Kemble added an apt suggestion, that "perhaps some of the manly, wicked queens, Semiramis, Cleopatra, could have written plays—but they lived their tragedies instead of writing of them."

II

At first sight it may seem as if one of Fanny Kemble's assertions—that no woman can be a dramatist because of her inevitable ignorance of life and of the experiences of existence from which she is debarred—is disproved by the undeniable triumphs of women in acting, and by the indisputable victories won by women in the field of prose fiction, achieved in spite of these admitted limitations. But on a more careful consideration it will appear that as an actress woman is called upon only to embody and to interpret characters conceived by man with the aid of his wider and deeper knowledge of life. And when we analyze the most renowned of the novels by which women have attained fame, we discover that the best of these deal exclusively with the narrower regions of conduct, and with the more restricted areas of life with which she is most familiar as a woman, and that when she seeks to go outside her incomplete experience of existence she soon makes us aware of the gaps in her equipment.

One of the strongest stories ever written by a woman is the 'Jane Eyre' of Charlotte Brontë; and the inexperience of the forlorn and lonely spinster is almost ludicrously made manifest in her portrayal of Rochester, a superbly projected figure, not sustained by intimate knowledge of the type to which he belongs. Charlotte Brontë knew Jane Eyre inside and out; but she did not know even the outside of Rochester. Be-

cause women are debarred with the most sedulous care from various experiences of existence they can never know men as men can know women. This is the basis for the shrewd remark that in dealing with affairs of the heart men novelists rarely tell all they know, whereas women novelists are often tempted to tell more than they know. Even women like George Eliot and George Sand, who have more or less broken out of bounds, are still more or less confined to their individual associations with the other sex; and they lack the inexhaustible fund of information about life which is the common property of men.

Women have most satisfactorily displayed their special endowment for fiction not in what must be called the dramatic novel, not in soul-searching studies like the 'Scarlet Letter' and 'Anna Karénine,' but rather in less solidly supported inquiries into the interrelation of character and social convention, as in 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'Castle Rackrent.' It would be unfair to assert that Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen are superficial; yet it is not unfair to say that they do not explore deeply, and that they do not deal with what Stevenson called the great passionate crises of existence, "when duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple." This is the essential struggle of the drama; and the authoress of 'Jane Eyre' sought to present it boldly, even if she was handicapped by insufficient information; and this essential struggle was what Charlotte Brontë herself missed in Jane Austen: "The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she re-

jects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, tho hidden, what the blood rushes thru, what is the unseen seat of life, and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores."

Jane Austen spent her great gift on the carving of cherry-stones, laboring with exquisite art to lift into temporary importance the eternally unimportant; and Charlotte Brontë, in her ampler endeavor, was ever hampered by inadequacy of knowledge. George Eliot, with wider opportunity than either of these predecessors, profited by both of them and borrowed their processes in turn; she was broader than they were, and bolder in her attack on life; her effort is more strenuously intellectual than theirs, and therefore a little fatiguing, and this is perhaps why her vogue seems now to be evaporating slowly. And when all is said, no one of these clever story-tellers really attains to an altitude of accomplishment where she can fairly be considered as a competitor of the mighty masters of prose fiction. No woman novelist is to be ranked among the supreme leaders, worthy to stand by the side of Cervantes and Fielding, Balzac and Tolstoi. The merits of the women novelists are many and they are beyond cavil; but no one of them has yet been able to handle a large theme powerfully and to interpret life with the unhasting and unresting strength which is the distinguishing mark of the mightier masters of fiction.

III

Furthermore, we find in the works of female story-tellers not only a lack of largeness in topic, but also a lack of strictness in treatment. Their stories, even when they charm us with apt portraiture and with adroit situation, are likely to lack solidity of structure. 'Castle Rackrent,' an illuminating picture of human nature in a special environment, is a straggling sequence of episodes; 'Pride and Prejudice' is almost plotless, when considered as a whole; and 'Romola' is ill-proportioned and misshapen. No woman has ever achieved the elaborate solidity of 'Tom Jones,' the superb structure of the 'Scarlet Letter,' or the simple unity of 'Smoke.' And here we come close to the most obvious explanation of the dearth of female dramatists —in the relative incapacity of women to build a plan, to make a single whole compounded of many parts, and yet dominated in every detail by but one purpose.

The drama demands a plot, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and with everything rigorously excluded which does not lead from the beginning thru the middle to the end. The novel refuses to submit itself to any such requirement; it can make shift to exist without an articulated skeleton. There is little or no plot, there is only a casual succession of more or less unrelated incidents in 'Gil Blas' and 'Tristram Shandy,' in the 'Pickwick Papers,' and in 'Huckleberry Finn.' The novel may be invertebrate and yet

survive, whereas the play without a backbone is dead —which is biologic evidence that the drama is higher in the scale of creation than prose fiction.

"The novel, as practised in English, is the perfect paradise of the loose end," so Mr. Henry James once pointed out, whereas "the play consents to the logic of but one way, mathematically right, and with the loose end as gross an impertinence on its surface and as grave a dishonor as the dangle of a snippet of silk or wool on the right side of a tapestry." The action of a story may be what its writer pleases, and he can reduce it to a minimum or embroider it at will with airy arabesques of incessant digression; but the plot of a play must be a straight line, the shortest distance between two points, the point of departure and the point of arrival. And it is because of this imperative necessity for integrity of construction that the drama is more difficult than prose fiction. Since a part of our pleasure in any art is derived from our consciousness of the obstacles to be overcome by the artist, and from our recognition of the skill displayed by him in vanquishing them, we have here added evidence in behalf of the belief in the artistic superiority of the play over the novel merely as a form of expression.

The drama may be likened to the sister art of architecture in its insistent demand for plan and proportion. A play is a poor thing, likely to expire of inanition, unless its author is possessed of the ability to build a plot which shall be strong and simple and clear, and unless he has the faculty of enriching it with abun-

dant accessories in accord with a scheme thought out in advance and adhered to from start to finish. With this constructive skill women seem to be less liberally endowed than men; at least, they have not yet revealed themselves as architects, altho they have won a warm welcome as decorators—a subordinate art for which they are fitted by their superior delicacy and by their keener interest in details. Much of the pervasive charm of many of the cleverest novels of female authorship lies in the persistent ingenuity with which the lesser points of character, of conduct, and of manners are presented. In Jane Austen, in Maria Edgeworth, and often also in George Eliot, we are delighted by little miracles of observation, and by little triumphs in the microscopic analysis of subtle and unsuspected motives. But in these very books, the story, however felicitously decorated, is not sustained by a severe architectural framework. And it is this firm certainty of structure that the drama imperatively demands.

In other words, women seem to be less often dowered than men with what Tyndall called "scientific imagination," with the ability to put together a whole in which the several parts are never permitted to distend a disproportionate space. This scientific imagination is essential to the playwright; and the novelist is fortunate if he also possesses it, altho it is not essential to him. A novel may be only a straggling succession of episodes; a play must have fundamental unity. A novelist may fire with a shot-gun and bring down his bird on the

wing, whereas a playwright needs a rifle to arrest the charging lion.

It is a significant fact that only once was George Sand really triumphant as a dramatist, and that this single success was won by the secret aid of the cleverest of contemporary playwrights. She was passionately devoted to the theater; she had many intimate friends among the stage-folk; she delighted in private theatricals; and she wrote a dozen or more plays, several of them dramatized from her own stories. The sole play which held its own on the stage in rivalry with the best work of Augier and Dumas *fils* was the 'Marquis de Villemer,' and it owed its more fortunate fate to the gratuitous and unacknowledged collaboration of Dumas *fils*.

For the author of the 'Mariage de Victorine,' the author of the 'Dame aux Camélias' had a high esteem, which he took occasion to express more than once in his critical papers; and she regarded him with semi-maternal affection, often inviting him to join the little parties at Nohant. On one of his visits he heard her say that she was intending to dramatize the 'Marquis de Villemer,' but that she did not quite see her way to compact its leisurely action in conformity with the rigid restrictions of the stage. That evening he borrowed a copy of the novel to take up to his own room; and the next morning when he came down to the late breakfast, he laid before her half a dozen sheets of paper, whereon she found a complete scenario for her guidance, an adroit division of her novel into acts and

scenes, needing only to be clothed with dialog. With his intuitive understanding of the principles of play-making, and with his masterly power of construction, he had solved her problems for her and made it easy for her to write the play.

Here is an unexampled kind of collaboration, since the invention of the story, the creation of the characters, the dialog to be spoken—these were all due to George Sand alone; but the concentrating of the interest, the heightening of the personages of the narrative to adjust themselves to the perspective of the theater, the serried and irresistible momentum of the action—these were the contribution of Dumas, a free-will offering to his old friend. The piece that she wrote was hers and hers alone, and yet it had a dramatic vitality lacking in all her other plays, because a man had intervened at the right moment to provide the architectural framework which the woman could not have bestowed upon it, however felicitous she might be in the decoration.

IV

Thus it is that we can supply two answers to the two questions posed at the beginning of this inquiry: Why is it that there are so few women playwrights? And why is it that the infrequent plays produced by women playwrights rarely attain high rank? The explanation is to be found in two facts: first, the fact that women are likely to have only a definitely limited knowledge

of life, and, second, the fact that they are likely also to be more or less deficient in the faculty of construction. The first of these disabilities may tend to disappear if ever the feminist movement shall achieve its ultimate victory; and the second may depart also whenever women submit themselves to the severe discipline which has compelled men to be more or less logical.

(1915.)

VIII

THE EVOLUTION OF SCENE-PAINTING

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I

ONLY recently have students of the stage seized the full significance of the fact that dramatic literature is always conditioned by the circumstances of the special theater for which it was designed. They are at last beginning to perceive that they need to know how a play was originally represented by actors before an audience and in a theater to enable them to appreciate adequately the technical skill of the playwright who composed it. The dramatist is subdued to what he works in; and he can accomplish only that which is possible in the particular playhouse for which his pieces were destined. For the immense open air auditorium of ancient Athens, with its orchestra leveled at the foot of the curving hillside whereon thousands of spectators took their places, the dramatic poet had to select a simple story and to build massively. For the unadorned platform of the Tudor theater, with its arras pendent from the gallery above the stage, and with its restless groundlings standing in the yard, the playwright was compelled to heap up swift episodes violent with action. For the eighteenth-century playhouse, with its apron projecting far beyond the line of the curtain, the dramatist was tempted to revel in

ornate eloquence and in elaborate wit. And nowadays the dramatic author utilizes skilfully all the manifold resources of the twentieth-century picture-frame stage, not only to give external reality to the several places where his story is supposed to be laid, but also to lend to these stage-sets the characteristic atmosphere demanded by his theme.

Merely literary critics, secluded in their studies, intent upon the poetry of a play and desirous of deducing its philosophy, rarely seek to visualize a performance on the stage, and they are, therefore, inclined to be disdainful of the purely theatrical conditions to which its author has had, perforce, to adjust his work. As a result they sometimes misunderstand the dramatic poet's endeavors, and they often misinterpret his intentions. On the other hand, purely theatrical critics may be inclined to pay too much attention to stage-arrangements, stage-business, and stage-settings, and even on occasion to disregard the dramatist's message and his power of creating character to consider his technic alone. And yet it can scarcely be denied that the theatrical critics are nearer to the proper method of approach than the literary critics who neglect the light which a careful consideration of stage-conditions and of stage-traditions may cast upon the masterpieces of the drama.

Since all these masterpieces of the drama were devised to be heard and to be seen rather than to be read, the great dramatic poets have always been solicitous about the visual appeal of their plays. They have ever

been anxious to garnish their pieces with the utmost scenic embellishment and the utmost spectacular accompaniment of the special kind that a play of that particular type could profit by. In view of the importance of this scenic embellishment and of its influence upon the methods of the successive playwrights, there is cause for wonder that we have no satisfactory attempt to tell the history of the art of the scene-painter as this has been developed thru the long ages. The materials for this narrative are abundant, even if they still lie in confusion. Certain parts of the field have been surveyed here and there; but no substantial treatise has yet been devoted to this alluring investigation. The scholar who shall hereafter undertake the task will need a double qualification; he must master the annals of painting in Renascence Italy, and later in France and in England, and he must familiarize himself with the circumstances of the theater at the several periods when the art of the scene-painter made its successive steps in advance.

It is partly because we have no manual covering the whole field that we find so many unwarranted assertions in the studies of the scholars who confine their criticism to a single period of the development of the drama. Partly also is this due to the fact that we are each of us so accustomed to the theaters of our own century and of our own country that we find it difficult not to assume similar conditions in the theaters of other centuries and other countries. Thus the Shaksperian commentators of the early eighteenth cen-

tury seem not to have doubted that the English playhouse in the days of Elizabeth was not unlike the English playhouse in the days of Anne; and as a result they cut up the plays of Shakspere into acts and into scenes, each supposed to take place in a different spot, in accord with the eighteenth-century stage practise, and absolutely without any justification from the customs of the Tudor theater. This was the result of looking back and of believing that the late sixteenth-century stage must have resembled the early eighteenth-century stage. We are now beginning to see that, in any effort to recapture the methods of the Elizabethan theater, we must first understand the customs of the medieval stage, and then look forward from that point. Of all places in the world the playhouse is, perhaps, the most conservative, and the most reluctant to relinquish anything which has proved its utility in the past and which is accepted by the public in the present; and many of the peculiarities of the Tudor theater are survivals from the medieval performances.

There are still to be found classical scholars who accept the existence of a raised stage in the theater of Dionysus at Athens, and even of painted scenery such as we moderns know; and they find support in the assertion of Aristotle that among the improvements due to Sophocles was the introduction of "scenery." But what did the Greek word in the text of Aristotle which is rendered into English as "scenery" really mean? At least, what did it connote to an Athenian? Some-

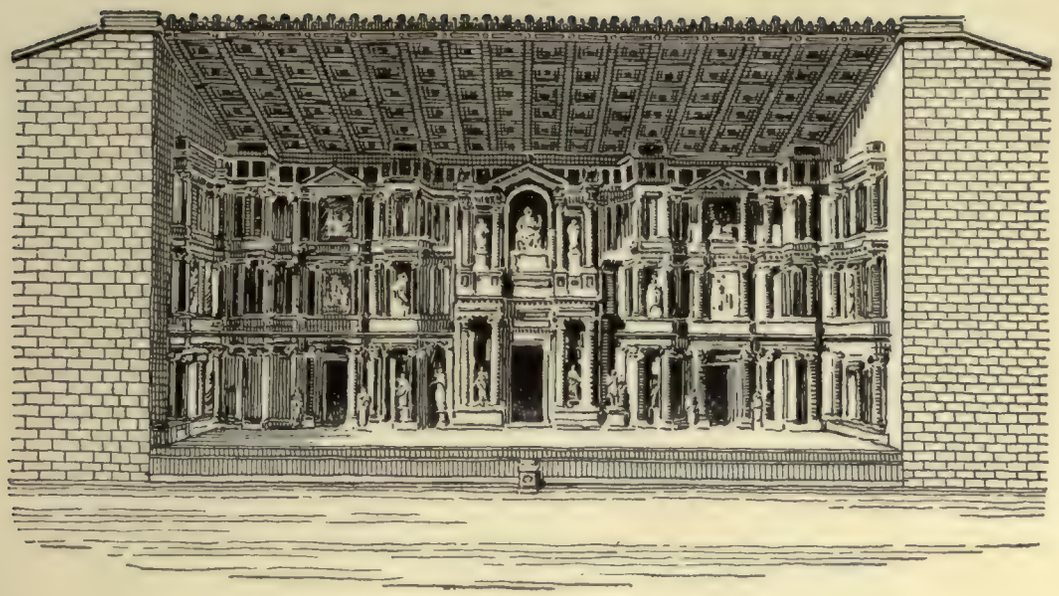
thing very different, we may be sure, from what the term "scenery" connotes to us. Certainly, the physical conditions of the stageless Attic theater precluded the possibilities of painted scenes such as we are now familiar with. That there were no methods of representing realistically, or even summarily, the locality where the action is taking place is proved by the detailed descriptions of these localities which the dramatic poet was careful to put into the mouths of his characters whenever he wished the audience to visualize the appropriate background of the action. We may be assured that the dramatists would never have wasted time in describing what the spectators had before their eyes. Ibsen and Rostand and d'Annunzio are poets, each in his own fashion, but their plays are devoid of all descriptions of the special locality where the action passes—that task has been spared them by the labors of the modern scene-painter working upon their specific directions.

As there was no scenery in the Greek theater so there was little or none in the Roman. M. Camille Saint-Saëns once suggested that certain airy scaffoldings in the Pompeian wall-paintings were perhaps derived from scenic accessories. But this seems unlikely enough; and the surviving Latin playhouses have a wide and shallow stage closed in by a sumptuous architectural background, suggesting the front of a palace with three portals, often conveniently utilized as the entrances to the separate dwellings of the several characters. Again, we may infer the absence of scenery

from the elaboration with which Plautus, for one, localizes the habitations of his leading characters. In Rome, as in Athens, some kind of a summary indication of locality, some easily understood symbol, may have been employed; but of scene-painting, as we moderns know the art, there is not a trace.

II

It is not until we come to the mysteries of the Middle Ages that we find the beginnings of the modern art, and even here it is only a most rudimentary attempt that we can discover. The mystery probably developed earliest in France, as it certainly flourished there most abundantly; and the French represented the dramatized Bible story on a long, shallow platform, at the back of which they strung along a row of summary indications of certain necessary places, beginning with Heaven on the spectator's left, and ending with Hell on his right, and including the Temple, the house of the high priest and the palace of Herod. These necessary places were called "mansions," and they served to localize the action whenever this was deemed advisable, the front of the platform remaining a neutral ground which might be anywhere. But these mansions do not prove the existence of scene-painters; they were very slight erections, a canopy over an altar serving to indicate the Temple, and a little portico sufficing to represent a palace; and they were probably built by house-carpenters and painted by house-



The Roman Theater at Orange

From the model at the Paris Opéra



The multiple set of the French medieval stage

From the model in the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University



The set of the Italian comedy of masks

painters, just as any boat which might be called for would be constructed by the shipwrights.

And as we need not assume the forming of a guild of scene-painters because of these mansions which performed some of the functions of our modern scenery, so also we must not assume it because the medieval artisans invented a variety of elaborate spectacular devices, flying angels, for example, and roaring flames from Hell-Mouth. Even in the stageless and sceneless Attic theater, there had been many mechanical effects of one kind or another, especially in the plays of Euripides—the soaring dragon-chariot of Medea, for instance, and the similar contrivance whereby a god might descend from the skies. Mechanical tricks even when they are most ingenious, do not imply the aid of the scene-painter; and even to-day they are the special task of the property-man, or of the master-mechanic, altho the scene-painter's aid may be invoked also to make them more effective. That there were property-makers in the Middle Ages admits of no doubt, and also highly skilled artificers delighting in the daring ingenuity of their inventions. There were abundant properties, it may be noted, on the Elizabethan stage, well-heads, thrones, and arbors; and Henslow's diary records payment for a variety of such accessories. But there is not in that invaluable document a single entry indicating any payment for anything equivalent to the work of the scene-painter.

Adroit as were the French mechanics who prepared the abundant spectacular effects of the medieval mys-

teries, they were surpassed in skill by the Italian engineers of the Renascence, who lent their aid to the superb outdoor festivals wherein the expanding artistic energy of the period was most magnificently displayed. Leonardo da Vinci did not disdain to design machines disclosing a surprising fertility of resource. It was from those outdoor spectacles of the Italians that the French court-ballets are directly descended, and also the English masks, which demanded the collaboration of Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson. But at first the Italians got along without the aid of the yet unborn scene-painter, and the inventions of the engineer were carried out by the mechanic and the decorator. Even as late as the seventeenth century a magnificent spectacle presented in the garden of the Pitti Palace in Florence relied mainly upon the ingenious engineer and scarcely at all upon the scene-painter. It seems probable that it is here in Italy in the Renascence, and at first as an accompaniment of the outdoor spectacle, or of its indoor rival, that the art of the actual scene-painter had its birth. The engineers required the aid of the artists—indeed, in those days, when there was little specialization of function, the engineers were almost always artists themselves, capable of their own decoration.

In time there would be necessary specialization, and after a while certain artists came to devote themselves chiefly to scene-painting, finding their immediate opportunity in the decoration of the operas, which then began to multiply. The opera has always been aris-



An outdoor entertainment in the gardens of the Pitti Palace in Florence in the early sixteenth century

From a contemporary print

tocratic, expensive, and spectacular, and it continued the tradition of the highly decorated open-air festivals. In fact, it improved upon this tradition, in so far as that was possible, and it achieved a variety of mechanical effects scarcely less complicated than those which charm our eyes to-day in 'Rheingold' and 'Parsifal.' Thirty years ago the late Charles Nuitter, the archivist of the Paris Opéra and himself a librettist of wide experience, drew my attention to Sabbatini's 'Practica di fabricar scene e machini ne' teatri' (published in 1638), and he assured me that the resources of the Opéra did not go beyond those which were at the command of the Italians three centuries earlier. "They could do then," he asserted, "almost everything that we can do now here at the Opéra. For example, they could bring a ship on the stage under full sail. We have only one superiority over them: we have abundant light now, we have electricity, and they were dependent on candles and lamps."

Yet even in Italy in the Renascence the most popular form of the drama, the improvised play which we call the comedy-of-masks, was performed in a traditional stage-setting representing an open square, whereon only the back-cloth seems to have been the work of the scene-painter, the sides of the stage being occupied by four or more houses, two or three on each side, often consisting of little more than a practicable door with a practicable window over it, not made of canvas, but constructed out of wood by the carpenter, with the solidity demanded by the climbing feats of

the athletic comedians and by their acrobatic agility. The traditional set of the comedy-of-masks conformed to that recommended for the comic drama by Serlio, in his treatise on architecture, published in 1545; but it may be noted also that Serlio's suggested set for the tragic drama was not dissimilar even if it were distinctly more dignified.

III

The opera seems to have been the direct descendant of the court-ballet, known in England as the mask, as that in its turn was derived from the open-air spectacle of the Italian Renascence, such as survived in Florence in the seventeenth century. In the beginning the court-ballets of France, like the masks of England, were not given in a theater with a stage shut off by a proscenium arch, but in the ball-room or banqueting-hall of a palace. One end of this spacious apartment, often but not always provided with a raised platform, served as the stage whereon one or more places, a mountain, for instance, and a grotto, were represented, at first by the decorated machines of the artistic engineers only, but afterward by the canvas frames of scene-painters. The action of the court-ballets or of the masks was not necessarily confined to this stage, so to call it. The spectators were ranged along the walls and under the galleries (if there were any), leaving the main part of the hall bare; and the performers descended frequently into this area, which

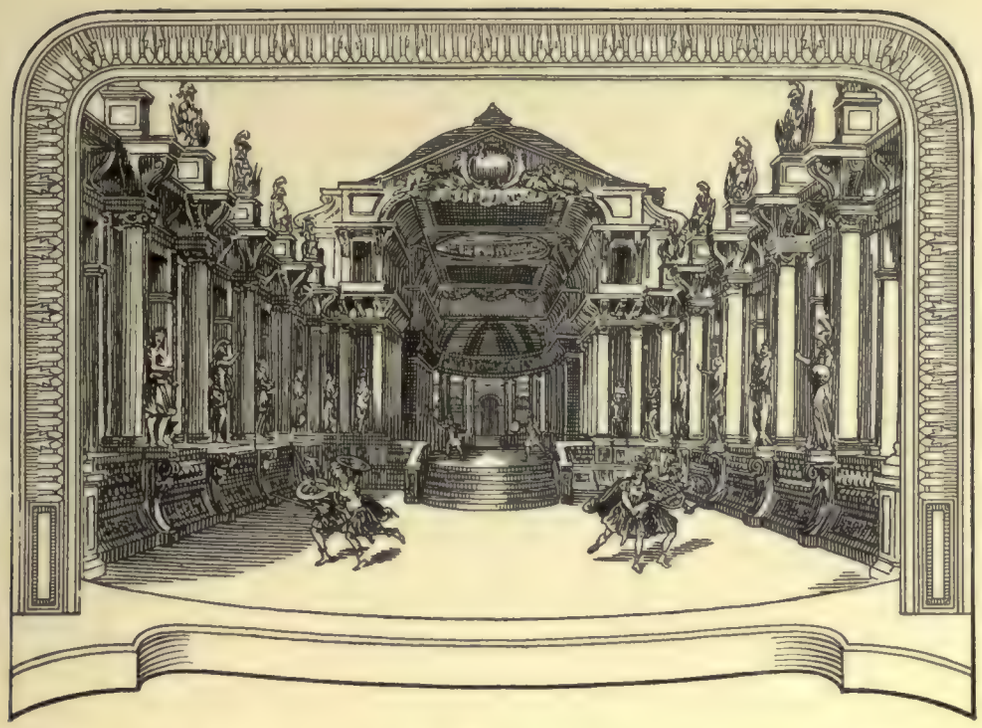
was kept free for them, and which was better fitted for their dances and processions and other intricate evolutions than the scant and cluttered stage.

A twentieth-century analog to this sixteenth-century practise can be seen in the spectacle presented in our modern three-ringed circuses—the 'Cleopatra,' for example, which was the opening number on the Barnum and Bailey program not long ago, where the Roman troops and the Egyptian populace came down from the stage and paraded around the arena. Bacon in his essay on 'Masques,' used the word "scenery" as tho he meant only decorated scaffolds, perhaps movable; and his expression of desire for room "to be kept clear" implies the use of the body of the hall for the maneuvers of the performers. Ludovic Celler, in his study of 'Mise en scène au dix-septième siècle' in France, shows that the action of the court-ballet was sometimes intermitted that the spectators could join in the dancing, as at an ordinary ball. In the earlier Italian open-air festivals, and in the earlier French court-ballets there was not even a proscenium sharply separating the stage from the rest of the hall; but in England by the time of Inigo Jones the advantage of a proscenium had been discovered, and we have more than one of the sketches which that skilful designer devised for his masks. But even then this proscenium was not permanent and architecturally conventionalized; it was invented afresh for every successive entertainment, and it was adorned with devices peculiar to that particular mask. Inigo Jones had also advanced to the

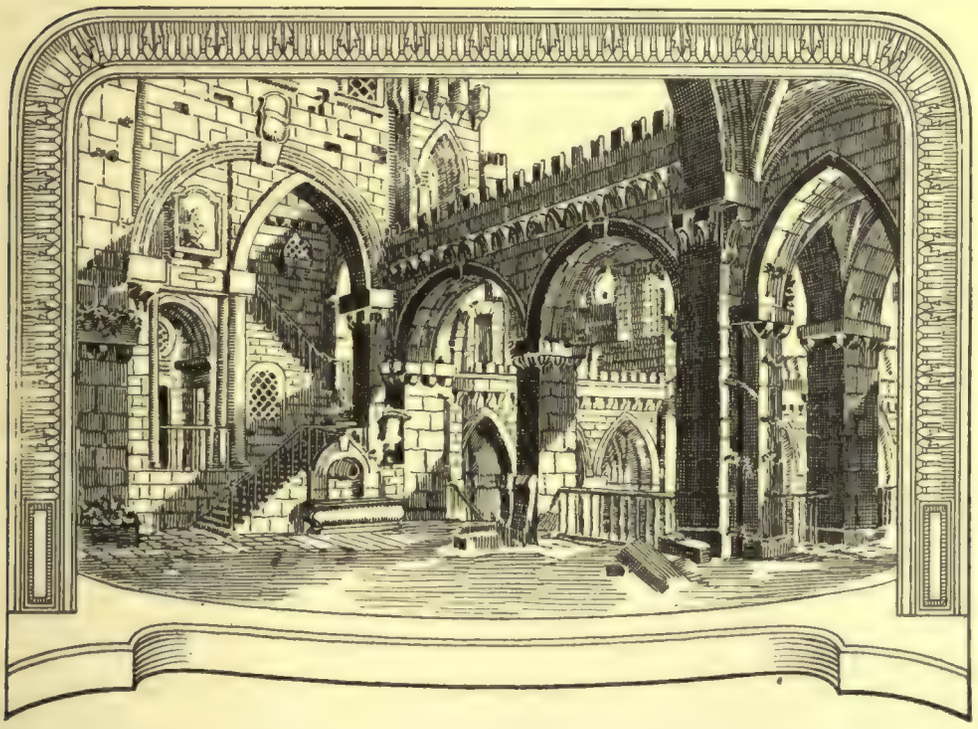
use of actual scenery, that is to say, of canvas stretched upon frames and then painted. Mr. Hamilton Bell believes it possible that the invention of grooves to sustain wings and flats may be ascribed to Inigo or to his assistant and successor, Webb.

Even in the Italian opera, where all the scenery was due to the brush of the scene-painter, there was for a long while a formal and monotonous regularity. Whether the set was an interior or an exterior, a public place or a hall in a palace, the arrangement was rectangular, with a drop at the back and a series of wings on either side equidistant from one another. This stiff representation of a locality is preserved for us nowadays in the toy-theaters which we buy for our children, altho it is now seen on the actual stage only in certain acts of old-fashioned operas. It lingers also in the variety-shows, where it is the proper setting for many items of their miscellaneous programs.

Altho the Italians had discovered perspective early in the Renascence they utilized it on the stage timidly at first, bestowing this rectangular regularity upon all their sets, both architectural interiors or exteriors and rural scenes, in which rigid wood-wings receded, diminishing in height to a landscape painted on the drop at the back, thus leaving the whole stage free for the actors. Not until the end of the seventeenth century did an Italian scene-painter, Bibiena, venture to abandon the balanced symmetry of the square set, and to slant his perspective so as to present buildings at an acute angle, thereby not only gaining a pleasing variety, but also



The set for the opera of 'Persée' (as performed at the Opéra in Paris in the seventeenth century)



A prison (designed by Bibiena in Italy in the eighteenth century)

enlarging immensely the apparent spaciousness of the scene, since he was able to carry the eyes of the spectator into vague distances, and to suggest far more than he was able to display. This advance was accompanied by a more liberal use of stairways and platforms —"practicables" as the stage-phrase is—that is to say, built up by the carpenters so that the actors could go from one level to another. Hitherto flights of steps and balconies had been only painted, not being intended for actual use by the performers.

A similar development took place also in the landscape scenes; the foreground was raised irregularly, so that the persons of the play might climb up. Practicable bridges were swung across torrents, and the earlier formality of pastoral scenes began to disappear. Apparently the scene-painters were influenced at this time by the landscape-painters, more especially by Poussin. The interrelation of painting and scene-painting, each in turn affecting the other, is far closer than most historians of art have perceived. It is not unlikely, for example, that Gainsborough and Constable, who were the fathers of the Barbizon men, had been stimulated by the stage-pictures of De Lutherbourg. David Garrick profited by the innovating art of De Lutherbourg, a pupil of Vanloo, who came to England in 1771. Apparently it was De Lutherbourg who invented "raking-pieces"—as the scene-painters term the low fragments of scenery which mask the inclines of mounds. To him also is credited the first use of transparent scenes to reproduce the effect of

moonlight upon water, and to suggest the flames of volcanoes. Thus to him must be ascribed the beginnings of that complicated realism by which our latter-day scene-painters are enabled to create an appropriate atmosphere for poetic episodes.

IV

The next step in advance, and one of the most important in the slow development of the scene-painter's art, took place in France early in the nineteenth century, and simultaneous with the romanticist movement, which modified the aims and ambitions of the artists as much as it did those of the poets. The severe stateliness of the stage-set which was adequate for the classicist tragedies of Racine and Voltaire, generally a vague interior of an indefinite palace, stiff and empty, was hopelessly unsuitable for the fiery dramas of Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas. An even greater opportunity for spectacular regeneration was afforded, in these same early decades of the nineteenth century, by the bold and moving librettos which Scribe constructed for Meyerbeer and Halévy at the Opéra, and for Auber at the Opéra-Comique. The exciting cause of the scenic complexities that we find in Wagner's music-dramas can be discovered in these librettos of Scribe's, from 'Robert the Devil' to the 'Africaine.' For one act of 'Robert the Devil,' that in which the spectral nuns dance among the tombs under the rays of the moon, Ciceri invented the most striking

and novel setting yet exhibited on any stage—a setting not surpassed in poetic glamor by any since seen in the theater, altho its eery beauty may have been rivaled by one scene in the 'Source,' a ballet produced also at the Opéra forty-five years ago—a moon-lit tarn in a forest-glade, with half-seen sylphs floating lightly over its silvered surface. This exquisitely poetic set was imported from Paris to New York and inserted in the brilliant spectacle of the 'White Fawn.'

The ample effect of these scenes was made possible only by the immense improvement in the illumination of the stage due to the introduction of gas. Up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century the stage-decorator had been dependent upon lamps—a few of these arranged at the rim of the curving apron which jutted out into the auditorium far beyond the proscenium, and a few more hidden here and there in the flies and wings. Early in the nineteenth century gas supplanted oil; and a little later than the middle of the century gas was powerfully supplemented by the calcium light. Toward the end of the century gas in its turn gave way to the far more useful electric light, which could be directed anywhere in any quantity, and which could be controlled and colored at will. It was Henry Irving, more especially in his marvelous mounting of a rather tawdry version of 'Faust,' who revealed the delicate artistic possibilities of our modern facilities for stage illumination.

In France the romanticist movement of Hugo was swiftly succeeded by the realistic movement of Balzac,

who was the earliest novelist to relate the leading personages of his studies from life to a characteristic background and to bring out the intimate association of persons and places. From prose fiction this evocation of characteristic surroundings was taken over by the drama; and a persistent effort was made to have the successive sets of a play suggestive and significant in themselves, and also representative of the main theme of the piece. The actors were no longer dependent upon the "float," as the footlights were called; they did not need to advance out on the apron to let the spectators follow the changing expression of their faces, and in time the apron was cut back to the line of the proscenium, and the curtain rose and fell in a picture-frame which cut the actors off from their proximity to the audience—a proximity forever tempting the dramatic poet to the purely oratorical effects proper enough on a platform.

When the modern play calls for an interior this interior now takes on the semblance of an actual room. Apparently the "box-set," as it is called, the closed-in room with its walls and its ceiling, was first seen in England in 1841, when 'London Assurance' was produced; but very likely it had earlier made its appearance in Paris at the Gymnase. To supply a room with walls of a seeming solidity, with doors and with windows, appears natural enough to us, but it was a startling innovation fourscore years ago. When the 'School for Scandal' had been originally produced at Drury Lane in 1775, the library of Joseph Surface, where Lady



The screen scene of the 'School for Scandal' at Drury Lane in 1778

From a contemporary print

Teazle hides behind the screen, was represented by a drop at the back, on which a window was painted, and by wings set starkly parallel to this back-drop and painted to represent columns. There were no doors; and Joseph and Charles, Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, walked on thru the openings between the wings, very much as tho they were passing thru the non-existent walls. To us, this would be shocking; but it was perfectly acceptable to English playgoers then; and to them it seemed natural, since they were familiar with no other way of getting into a room on the stage.

The invention of the box-set, of a room with walls and ceilings, doors and windows, led inevitably to the appropriate furnishing of this room with tangible tables and chairs. Even in the eighteenth century the stage had been very empty; it was adorned only with the furniture actually demanded by the action of the drama; and the rest of the furniture, bookcases and sideboards, chairs and tables, was frankly painted on the wings and on the back-drop by the side of the painted mantelpieces, the painted windows, and the painted doors. In the plays of the twentieth century characters sit down and change from seat to seat; but in the plays produced in England and in France before the first quarter of the nineteenth century all the actors stood all the time—or at least they were allowed to sit only under the stress of dramatic necessity—as in the fourth act of 'Tartuffe,' for instance. In all of Molière's comedies there are scarcely half a dozen characters who have occasion to sit down; and this sitting-down is limited

to three or four of his more than thirty pieces. Nowadays every effort is made to capture the external realities of life. Sardou was not more careful in composing his stage-sittings in his fashion than was Ibsen in prescribing the scenic environment that he needed. The author's minute descriptions of the scenes where the action of the 'Doll's House' and of 'Ghosts' passes prove that Ibsen had visualized sharply the precise interior which was, in his mind, the only possible home for the creatures of his imagination. And Mr. Belasco has recently bestowed upon the winning personality of his 'Peter Grimm' the exact habitation to which that appealing creature would return in his desire to undo after death what in life he had rashly commanded.

V

While the scene-painter of our time is most often called upon to realize the actual in an interior and to delight us with a room the dominant quality of which is that it looks as tho it was really lived in by the personages we see moving around in it, he is not confined to those domestic scenes. There are other plays than the modern social dramas; and these other plays make other demands upon the artist. On occasion he has to supply a gorgeous scenic accompaniment for the Roman and Egyptian episodes of 'Antony and Cleopatra,' to suggest the blasted heath where Macbeth may meet the weird sisters, and to call up before our delighted eyes the placid charm of the Forest of Arden.



A landscape set

Designed by F. Fontanesi in Italy in the eighteenth century



A set for the opera of 'Robert le Diable'

At the Paris Opéra

The awkward and inconsistent sky-borders, strips of pendent canvas wholly unsatisfactory as substitutes for the vast depths of the starry heavens, he is able to dispense with by lowering a little the hangings at the top edge of the picture-frame, and by thus limiting the upward gaze of the spectators, so that he can forgo the impossible attempt to imitate the changing sky. He can achieve an effect of limitless space, as in the last act of the 'Garden of Allah' (which brings before us the endless vision of Sahara), by the use of a cyclorama background, the drop being suspended from a semicircular rod which runs around the top of the stage, shutting in the view absolutely, and yet yielding itself to a representation of sand and sky meeting afar off on the faint horizon.

In the past half-century, and more especially since the improvement of the electric light, scene-painting has become very elaborate and very expensive. Instead of being kept in its proper place as the decoration of the drama, as a beautiful accessory of the action, it has often been pushed to the front, so as to attract attention to itself, and thereby to distract attention from the play which it was supposed to illuminate. Sometimes Shakspere has been smothered in scenery, and sometimes the art of the actor has been subordinated to the art of the scene-painter. Now, it must be admitted that nothing is too good for the masterpieces of the drama, and that Sophocles no less than Shakspere ought to be presented to the public with all the pomp that his lofty themes and his marvelous

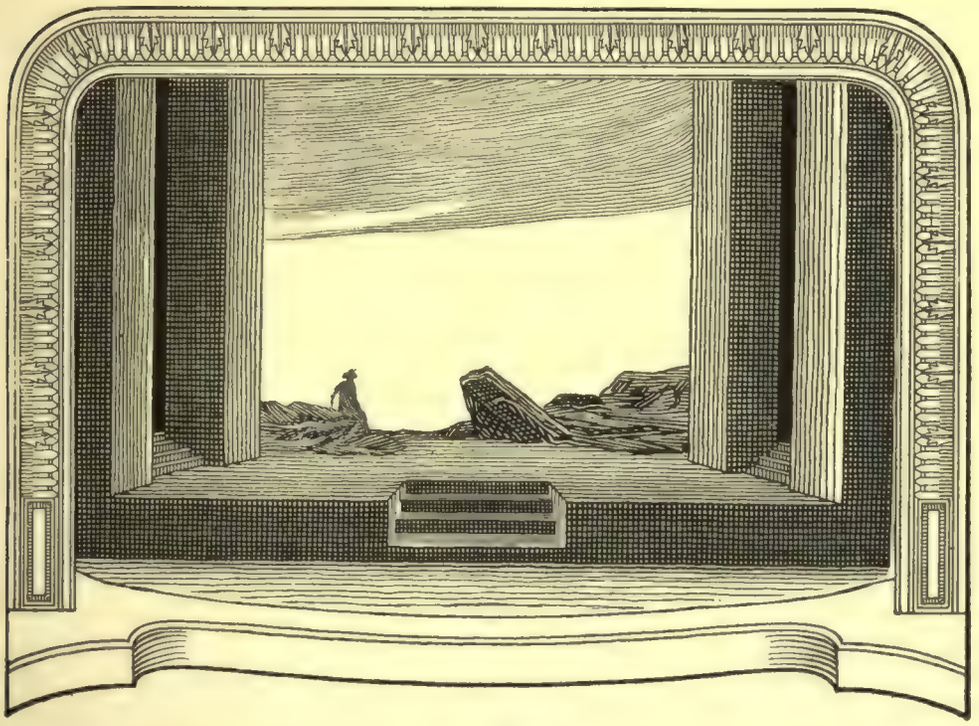
workmanship may demand. But the plays of the mighty dramatic poets ought not to be used merely as pegs on which to hang gorgeous apparel. After all, the play's the thing; and whenever the scene-painter and his invading partner, the stage-manager, are prompted to oust the drama from its pre-eminence, and to substitute an exhibition of their accessory arts, the result is a betrayal of the playwright.

A well-known British art critic once told me that when the curtain rose at a certain London revival of 'Twelfth Night,' and disclosed Olivia's garden, he sat entranced at the beauty of the spectacle before his eyes, with its subtle harmonies of color, so entranced, indeed, that he found himself distinctly annoyed when the actors came on the stage and began to talk. For the moment, at least, he wished them away, as disturbers of his esthetic delight in the lovely picture on which his eyes were feasting. But even a stage-setting as captivating as this might very well be justified if it had been employed to fill a gap in the action, and to buttress up the interest of an episode where the dramatist had allowed the appeal of his story to relax. Perrin, the manager of the Comédie-Française thirty years ago, declined to produce a French version of 'Othello' because he found a certain dramatic emptiness in the scenes at Cyprus at the opening of the second act, which he felt he would have to mask by the beauty of spectacular decoration, too costly an expedient in his opinion for the finances of the theater just then.



The set of the last act of the 'Garden of Allah'

From the model in the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University



A set for 'Medea'

Designed by Herr Gustav Lindemann

It was Perrin, however, who produced the French version of the 'Œdipus the King' of Sophocles, and who bestowed upon it a single set of wonderful charm and power, at once dignified, appropriate, and beautiful in itself. It represented an open space between a temple and the palace of the ill-fated Œdipus, with an altar in the center, and with the profile of another temple projected against the distant sky and relieved by the tall, thin outline of poplar-trees. The monotony of this rectangular architectural construction was avoided by placing all the buildings on a slant, the whole elevation of the temple being visible on the left of the spectators, whereas only a corner of the colonnade of the palace on the right was displayed. This set at the Théâtre-Français was the absolute antithesis of the original scenic surroundings in the theater of Dionysus more than two thousand years ago, when the masterpiece of Sophocles had been performed in the open-air orchestra, with only a hut of skins or a temporary wooden building to serve as a background for the bas-reliefs of the action.

So elaborate, complicated, and costly have stage-sets become in the past half-century, that there are already signs of the violent reaction that might be expected. Mr. Gordon Craig, an artist of remarkable individuality, has gone so far as to propose what is almost an abolition of scene-painting. He seeks to attain effects of massive simplicity by the use of unadorned hangings and of undecorated screens, thus substituting vast spaces for the realistic details of the

modern scene-painter. No doubt, there are a few plays for which this method of mounting would be appropriate enough—M. Maeterlinck's 'Intruder,' for one, and his 'Sightless' for another, plays which are independent of time and space, and in which the action appears to pass in some undiscovered limbo. As yet the advanced and iconoclastic theories of Mr. Craig have made few adherents, the most notable being the German, "Professor" Reinhardt, who lacks Mr. Craig's fine feeling for form and color, and who is continually tempted into rather ugly eccentricities of design, being apparently moved by the desire to be different from his predecessors rather than by the wish to be superior to them.

VI

Interesting as are Mr. Craig's suggestions, and well-founded as may be his protest against the excessive ornamentation to which we are too prone nowadays, there is no reason to fear that his principles will prevail. The art of the scene-painter is too welcome, it is too plainly in accord with the predilections of the twentieth century, for it to be annihilated by the fiat of a daring and reckless innovator. It will be wise if the producers should harken to Mr. Craig's warnings and curb their tendency to needless extravagance; but we may rest assured that a return to the bareness of the Attic theater or of the English theater in the time of the Tudors is frankly unthinkable now that the



The set of 'Œdipe-Roi' (at the Théâtre Français)



The set of the 'Return of Peter Grimm'

From the model in the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University

art of scene-painting has been developed to its present possibilities. In fact, the probability is rather that the scene-painters will continue to enlarge the boundaries of their territory and to discover new means and new methods of delighting our eyes by their evocations of interesting places.

Perhaps they would be more encouraged to go on and conquer new worlds if there was a wider recognition of the artistic value of their work. Altho De Lutherbourg and Clarkson Stanfield won honorable positions in the history of painting by their easel-pictures, the art of scene-painting does not hold the place in the public esteem that many of its practitioners deserve. Théophile Gautier, often negligible as a critic of the acted drama, was always worth listening to when he turned to pictorial art; and he was frequent in praise of the scene-painters of his time and of scene-painting itself as a craft of exceeding difficulty and of inadequate appreciation. Probably one reason why the scene-painter has not received his due meed of praise is because his work is not preserved. It exists only during the run of the play which it decorates. When the piece disappears from the boards, the scenes which adorned it vanish from sight. They linger only in the memory of those who happened to see this one play—and even then, in fact, only in the memory of such spectators as have trained themselves to pay attention to stage-pictures. For the scene-painter there is no Luxembourg; still less is there any Louvre. As Gautier sympathetically declared, "it is sad to think

that nothing survives of those masterpieces destined to live a few evenings only, and disappearing from the washed canvas to give place to other marvels, equally fugitive. How much invention, talent, and genius may be lost—and not always leaving even a name!"

It is pleasant to know that at the Opéra in Paris a formal order of the government has for now a half-century prescribed the preservation of the original models—the little miniature sets which the scene-painter submits for the approval of the manager and the dramatist before he begins work upon the actual scene. These models are always upon the same scale, and in the gallery connected with the library of the Opéra a dozen of these models are set up to be viewed by visitors. Of course no tiny model, however cleverly fashioned, can give the full effect of the scene which has been conceived in terms of a huge stage; and yet the miniature reproductions do not betray the scene-painter as much as an engraving or a photograph often betrays the painter. Whatever its limitations, and they are obvious enough, the collection of models at the Opéra is at least an attempt to retard the oblivion that Théophile Gautier deplored, and to provide for the scene-painter a substitute, however inadequate, for the Louvre and the Luxembourg.

(1912.)

IX

THE BOOK OF THE OPERA

THE BOOK OF THE OPERA

I

A FEW years ago *Punch* had a satirical drawing representing a British matron conveying a bevy of youthful daughters to the French play in London. To a friend who called her attention to the rather risky atmosphere of the very Parisian comedy which they were about to behold, the worthy mother promptly explained that she was not bringing her daughters to see the play itself; she was bringing them to see only the acting. Probably a great many opera-goers would make a similar explanation if they were asked whether they were interested in the book of the opera or only in the music. They would be likely to protest that they cared little or nothing for the libretto, and that they were attracted solely by the score. But, as a matter of fact, the opera-goers who might make this reply would be self-deceived. Whether they are aware of it or not, they are unlikely to be attracted to any opera unless it happens to have an interesting story, built up into a coherent and captivating plot. When the libretto is unintelligible or uninteresting, the most delightful music fails to allure them into the opera-house. This is one of the reasons why the 'Magic Flute,' which contains much of Mozart's most beautiful

melodic invention, is so rarely heard in our opera-houses, and why it is so sparsely attended when it is presented. The libretto of the 'Magic Flute' is dull and ineffective, and even Mozart's genius proved unable to overcome this initial handicap.

The ordinary opera-goer is likely to treat the libretto with calm contempt. He is prone to assert that nobody cares about the words, and he does not reflect that behind and beneath the words is the supporting structure of the story. After all, an opera is a play, it is a music-drama, and the plot is as important in a play the words of which are to be sung as in a play the words of which are to be spoken. True it is, of course, that in an opera the words may not be heard distinctly, and perhaps they need not be seized with certainty, since the emotion they set forth is more amply conveyed by the music. But the musician cannot express emotion musically, unless there is emotion for him to express, unless he has characters immeshed in a series of situations which evoke vivid and contrasting sentiments for him to translate into music. As the music-drama is a drama, it must obey the laws of the drama; it must represent a conflict of contending desires; it must be carried on by characters firm of purpose and resolute in achieving their several aims. These characters must be sharply individualized and boldly contrasted; and the story in which they take part must be at once strong and simple, calling for no elaborate explanation and moving forward steadily and irresistibly. It must have a lyric aspect, lending itself natu-

rally to song; and it ought also to afford opportunity for the spectacular effects appropriate to the large stage of the opera-house.

So contemptuous of the libretto is the ordinary opera-goer that he rarely inquires as to the name of the author of the book, altho he is generally familiar with the name of the composer of the score. He may or he may not be aware that Wagner was his own librettist, and quite possibly he supposes that it is the ordinary custom of the composers to write the words for their own music. He knows that 'Carmen' was composed by Bizet, and that the 'Huguenots' was composed by Meyerbeer; but he would be greatly puzzled if he was asked to name the librettists of these two operas, the adroit playwrights who devised the skeletons of dramatic action which sustained the composers and provided them with ample opportunities for the exercise of their melodic gift. As a matter of fact, the book of 'Carmen' was written in collaboration by two of the most distinguished French dramatists of the nineteenth century, Meilhac and Halévy, the authors of 'Froufrou' and of the librettos of Offenbach's 'Belle Hélène,' 'Grand Duchess of Gérolstein,' and 'Périchole.' And the book of the 'Huguenots' was the work of the master stage-craftsman, Scribe, the author of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' and of the 'Ladies' Battle,' and of countless other plays performed in every modern language, and in all the countries of the world.

Bizet wrote other operas besides 'Carmen,' and if these other operas have vanished from the stage, the

reason may be that the librettos to which they were composed were not as ingenious and not as interesting as the book of 'Carmen.' One of these forgotten operas of Bizet's was a dramatization of the 'Fair Maid of Perth,' and another was called the 'Pearl Fisher'; but neither of these books was devised by Meilhac and Halévy. And Scribe was not only the librettist of the 'Huguenots' and of the 'Africaine' for Meyerbeer; he also wrote the books of 'Fra Diavolo' and of 'Crown Diamonds' for Auber, the book of the 'Dame Blanche' for Boïeldieu, and the book of the 'Juive' for Halévy. Indeed, it is evident that Wagner himself as a librettist must be considered as a direct disciple of Scribe; certainly his book of the 'Flying Dutchman' has its points of resemblance with the books Scribe invented for 'Robert the Devil,' and for the 'Prophet.' Even the libretto of Wagner's 'Master-Singers of Nuremberg,' altho it is far richer in tone than any of Scribe's librettos for Auber, is constructed in accord with principles already applied by the French playwright. In fact, the influence of Scribe is patent thruout the long history of opera in the nineteenth century; he was not only the most prolific of librettists himself, but the operatic formula he devised was borrowed by the best of the librettists who followed him. Scribe was not the writer of the books of 'Faust,' or of 'Roméo et Juliet,' or of 'Aïda,' but all these librettos were carefully built in accord with the principles that he had practised for half a century.

II

Probably the average opera-goer is contemptuous of the libretto, because he thinks it is an easy task to write the mere words of an opera. To him, no doubt, the opera lives by its music, and by its music alone. But there is really no warrant for this uncomplimentary attitude. An opera is a music-drama, and if it is to achieve success, wide-spread and long-lasting, its drama must be as effective as its music. Experience proves that, so far from being as easy as it seems, the construction of a satisfactory libretto is really a difficult feat, to be achieved only by an expert in stage-craft. It is no task to be confided to an amateur play-maker, to a mere lyrist, ignorant of the art of the theater. First of all, a satisfactory book must contain the skeleton of a good play; and, second, this must be the special kind of play which will not only inspire the musician, but afford him a succession of special opportunities for the exercise of his own art. The book of an opera must be a good play; and more than once have we seen a libretto deprived of its music and written out again in prose for production in non-musical theaters. 'Carmen' is one example of this transformation. The late Sir Henry Irving was so taken with Wagner's 'Flying Dutchman' that he had it made over into a play for his own acting—'Vanderdecken.'

The book of an opera must be a good play, and therefore not a few successful operas have been composed

on plots which had already won approval as plays on the stage. Indeed, many modern composers are so convinced of the necessity that librettos shall be attractive in themselves that they are continually borrowing popular plays to deck with melody. 'Salomé' and 'Pelléas et Mélisande,' 'Madam Butterfly' and 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' the 'Bohème' and the 'Tosca' were all successful without music before they were set to music to win a second success. The book of Verdi's 'Rigoletto' is based on Victor Hugo's drama, 'Le Roi s'Amuse'; and oddly enough it was the operatic libretto, rather than the original poetic drama, which suggested the English play on the same theme, Tom Taylor's blank-verse drama, the 'Fool's Revenge.' Another of Verdi's librettos was borrowed from Hugo's 'Hermani', while his 'Traviata,' as we all know, is taken from the play of the younger Dumas, long popular in America as 'Camille.' Two of Verdi's latest operas had Shaksperian themes, 'Otello' and 'Falstaff.'

It is instructive to note, so an American musical critic once asserted, that of all Gounod's dozen operas, "the only two which have survived are the two which are derived from Goethe's 'Faust' and from Shakspere's 'Romeo and Juliet'"; and he added a reminder that in these operas the music owes its success "not only to the aid derived from its associations with a favorite play, but also in part to the fact that the composer's creative imagination was fertilized by the splendid opportunities for dramatic composition offered by these plays. Gounod was moved by the joys

and woes of Margaret and of Juliet, and it is only under the influence of deep feeling that such masterworks can be created." When Gounod set to music a poetic play by Goethe, and when Verdi set to music a group of characters created by Shakspere, the composers might well be inspired by the poets; and they were thus aided to attain the utmost of which they are capable as musicians.

But it may be doubted whether any musician could find any really helpful inspiration in dramas of vulgar violence, such as the 'Tosca' of Sardou, and the 'Salomé' of Oscar Wilde; and it is extremely improbable that the operas composed to such unworthy themes will be able to achieve any durable popularity. In plots of so coarse a character there is neither beauty nor poetry, and the vogue of music-dramas having subjects so debased is likely to be fleeting. On the other hand, there was both poetry and beauty in the original plays of 'Madam Butterfly' and 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' and we need not be surprised if the operas composed on these themes prove to have a long life in the musical theaters. We may even go further and suggest that there was a haunting and ethereal grace about Maeterlinck's 'Pelléas et Mélisande' which seemed almost to demand translation into the sister art of music.

The two most effective French comedies of the eighteenth century, the 'Barber of Seville' and the 'Marriage of Figaro,' supplied librettos, one for Rossini and the other for Mozart. We may be sure that sooner

or later some other composer, Italian or American or German, will be tempted to undertake an opera based on Fulda's 'Two Sisters,' in which there could not help being a very effective part for the prima donna. And sooner or later again some musician with an appreciation of humor and sentiment will be moved to take for his libretto the comedy of 'Masks and Faces,' by Charles Reade and Tom Taylor, generally known by the name of its fascinating heroine, Peg Woffington. No doubt there are not a few other modern plays in which composers will discover musical possibilities.

III

The key to an understanding of the importance of the libretto lies in the term Wagner used to describe the art-work of the future; he called this a "music-drama." The exclusive lover of music is tempted to look down on opera because its music is contaminated with drama; and for a similar reason, the exclusive lover of the drama is not attracted to opera because the drama is there more or less sacrificed to the music. But there are many opera-goers who best relish music and the drama when they are presented in conjunction. In a music-drama of the highest type, in Wagner's 'Tannhaüser,' for example, the music and the drama are Siamese twins; they were brought forth at a single birth. Each helps the other, and neither calls upon the other for any undue sacrifice. They can be enjoyed together better than they can be enjoyed apart,

since each depends upon the other; and united they stand or fall.

Mr. H. T. Finck was not overstating the case when he insisted that the ideal opera is one in which the book and the score are each of them of absorbing interest, "and yet make a doubly deep impression when heard together." The stories of 'Faust' and of 'Carmen' and of 'Lohengrin' are delightful in themselves, merely to read; and a musical expert can find pleasure in playing the music from them on the piano. "Yet how much more effective they are when we hear and see music and play together on the stage." And then the same writer goes on to point out that the best "libretto is one which tells its story to the eye," as in the case of 'Carmen,' for example. "No one with eyes to see can fail, for instance, to follow the career of 'Carmen,' from her flirtation with the young officer to the scene before the bullring where he stabs her."

It was an acute French dramatic critic who once asserted that "the skeleton of every good play is a pantomime," and the assertion is more emphatically true when applied to the skeleton of a libretto. Indeed, as the words are rarely heard distinctly, and as they are often in a foreign language, there is double need of a story so clear and so straightforward that it can be caught by the eye alone from the actions and gestures and facial expressions of the performers without the aid of the actual words. But the inventing and the constructing of a plot of this seemingly simple effectiveness is a task of extraordinary difficulty—if

we may judge by the infrequency of its achievement. And undoubtedly it is this difficulty which has led so many musicians to compose their scores to books only slightly altered from plays which had already an attested popularity in the theater. By so doing it has seemed to them that they were minimizing the risk of finding their music handicapped by an ineffective story. The danger in this case lies in the temptation to set to music any play which may chance to be successful without considering sufficiently whether it is really worthy of the composer's labor.

There is another disadvantage also in this snatching at successful plays to serve as opera-librettos. Most successful plays nowadays deal with modern life, and they may owe much of their success to the skill with which the dramatist has been able to seize the external aspects of reality. Now, it is an interesting question whether a realistic piece of this sort can ever supply an entirely satisfactory book for an opera, since music is emotional and idealizing. To many persons the opera seems singularly unreal, strangely remote from actual life. Such persons are shocked that Tristan, for instance, should sing for half an hour when he is dying from physical weakness. Tolstoy sided with those who take this attitude, and he had no difficulty in showing up the absurd unreality of an operatic performance, if one insists upon applying to it the standard of our ordinary existence, since we do not burst into song ordinarily to express our every-day desires. Of course, there would be no great difficulty in showing up the absurd

unreality of every other art, if the same standard is insisted upon. No art can justify itself for a moment unless we are willing to admit the essential conventions which alone permit it to exist.

Tolstoy might as well have pointed out that sculpture is ridiculous, since no human being is ever all of one color, body and clothes, as a statue must be, whether it is made of marble or of bronze. He could have declared that painting is equally untrue to the mere facts of life, since it represents nature absolutely without motion, as when it depicts a field of waving corn which does not really wave but stands fixed forever. If Tolstoy or any one else refuses to accept the conventions of any art, there is no possible reply, except to make it clear to him that he is thereby depriving himself of the delight which that art can give. A departure from the mere fact underlies every art; and it is only because of that departure that the art exists. By convention, that is to say, by tacit agreement between the artist and the public, the artist is allowed to deny certain of the facts of life in order to provide the public with the specific pleasure which only his art can afford.

In the Shaksperian drama the underlying convention is that the persons of the play belong to a race of people who always express themselves poetically in English blank verse. In opera this necessary agreement requires us to concede the existence of men and women to whom song is the natural means of communicating all their sentiments and all their thoughts. If we are

willing to accept this implied contract, then there is no absurdity in Tristan's singing with his dying breath, since he belongs to a race of creatures who have no other method of speech. If we are unwilling to be parties to this agreement, if we deny the existence of any such creatures, then there is nothing for us to do but to keep out of the opera-house. It was this convention which Tolstoy rejected, and by this rejection he refused the enjoyment which the opera can give to those who are satisfied to accept its conditions.

IV

But there is no denying that the imperative operatic convention requires us to admit a very violent departure from the facts of life as we all know them. We are now so accustomed to blank verse in Shakspere's plays, tragic and comic, that we accept it almost without noticing it. By long habit, we have come to consider blank verse as "natural" in a poetic play, especially when that play sets before us heroic figures of the remote past. And here is the danger in the operas which have been composed on books made out of modern popular pieces, more or less realistic in their atmosphere. The "naturalness" of the men and women in these plays of to-day tends to draw attention to the "unnaturalness" of their customary use of song to express their emotions.

This danger Wagner skilfully avoided in his later music-dramas derived from the Nibelungen myth.

He set before us shadowy creatures involved in strange intrigues far back in the legendary past and wholly devoid of any modern or realistic suggestion. As Tristan and Siegfried and Brunhild are all idealized persons, taking part in poetic fictions, we are willing enough to accept their exclusive use of song; and we recognize at once the artistic inconsistency of Tolstoy's protest. To beings so remote from our daily life, from our ordinary experience, the standard of fact cannot fairly be applied. We acknowledge the full right of such creatures to dwell eternally in the land of song alone.

But we are perhaps a little less willing to make this acknowledgment when we find the composer asking us to believe that men and women of our own time and of our own country, the characters of the 'Girl of the Golden West,' for example, or even some of those of 'Madam Butterfly,' should eschew the plain prose of ordinary speech and insist on discussing their love-affairs in the obviously "unnatural" medium of song. That is to say, there is a striking incongruity between musical expression and the realistic characters of most modern plays. We enjoy the opera partly because it is not "natural," not "real," in the ordinary meaning of these words; and if the plot and the people are aggressively modern and matter-of-fact, our attention is necessarily called to the "unnaturalness" of their incessant vocalization. A certain remoteness from real life, even a certain vaporous intangibility as to time and place, seem to be a helpful element in our enjoyment of a music-drama.

Perhaps it is due to this remoteness, to this unreality, that the opera-goer is willing enough to have a story end unhappily, altho the playgoer is now likely to be painfully affected by a tragic ending. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that most of our popular plays end merrily in a church, while most of our popular operas end sadly in a churchyard. The calculation has been made that out of twoscore operas sung in New York at the two opera-houses a season or so ago, only half a dozen ended happily; the large majority of them culminated in the death of the hero or of the heroine or of both together. Music is a sister of poetry, and we need not wonder that the musicians are likely to prefer the opera-book which has a tragic catastrophe.

(1910.)

X

THE POETRY OF THE DANCE

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I

THE Greek of old was wise in his generation and poetic as was his habit, when he imagined nine muses and when he feigned that each of them was to watch over a separate art, and to inspire those who might strive to excel in this. It is true that nowadays we cannot help feeling that the sister-muses of Tragedy and of Comedy have been a little derelict to their duty, if they are really responsible for all the plays of our time, not a few of which seem to be sadly lacking in inspiration. But of late another of the sacred nine appears to have aroused herself out of her lethargy and to have awakened to a fuller realization of her opportunity. At least, there are many evidences now visible in the United States that Terpsichore has been attending strictly to business, and sending out travelers with many diverse specimens of her wares. Indeed, there has probably never been a time when so many different varieties of the dance have been on exhibition before the American people. It was once remarked by a shrewd observer that there were only three kinds of dancing, the graceful, the ungraceful, and the disgraceful. And in the United States we have had presented to us in the past few years specimens of all three kinds.

In the middle of September, 1910, the Playground Association of America held an outdoor session in Van Cortlandt Park, in New York, and three hundred persons, mostly children, took part in the exercises. The most interesting feature of the program was a series of national folk-dances executed by boys and girls from the public schools. New York is the huge melting-pot where all nationalities of Europe meet to be fused into Americans; and these children were, most of them, executing the dances of the countries their parents had come from—dances for which they had, therefore, a traditional and hereditary predilection. German girls in the costumes of the Rhine, gave a peasant dance to the simple tune of 'Ach, du lieber Augustin'; and colored children, in perfect rhythm, moved thru a reel to the music of the 'Suwanee River.' The wild Hungarian *czardas* was carried off with a splendid swing by men and women born on the banks of the Danube; and an Irish quartet displayed their agility and their precision of time-keeping in a four-handed country-dance. And at the end, all the participants in the several national dances took part in a general harvest-dance. This was an effective spectacle, possible only here in America, where representatives of many peoples come to mingle, even tho each of them retains a sentiment of loyalty to the old home it has left forever.

Here in the open air, in a public park, at this meeting of the Playground Association, there was this joyous and wholesome revival of the folk-dances of a dozen

different races; and at the same time, in one or another of half a score of the theaters of the great city, ill-trained and half-clothed women were vainly capering about the stage in doubtful efforts to suggest the Oriental contortions of Salomé. These were, most of them, consciously and deliberately inartistic, appealing directly to the baser instincts and to the lower curiosities of man. Nothing could have been in sharper contrast with the folk-dances of the foreign-born children, which were gay and healthy and spontaneous. The exercises in the park were examples of the kind of dancing which cannot help being graceful, while most of the performances in the theaters were specimens of the kind of dancing which can fairly be described as ungraceful, even if they cannot all of them be dismissed as disgraceful. While the folk-dances of the children would fill the heart with a pure delight, the sorry spectacle presented in some of the theaters was not to be witnessed without a certain loss of self-respect; it recalled the gross pantomimes of the later Roman theater, righteously denounced by the Fathers of the Church.

Yet it is only just to record that in other theaters there were then other spectacles to make amends for these sorry exhibitions. There were several interesting attempts to recall the severe beauty of Greek dancing. Lithe figures with free and floating draperies sought to recapture the irreclaimable charm that lives for us in the lovely Tanagra figurines, or that flits elusively around the sides of Attic vases. Ambitious ef-

forts were made by one dancer and by another to translate into step and posture and gesture the intangible poetry of Shelley and the haunting music of Mendelssohn. Unfortunately, the result was rarely commensurate with the effort; and, in fact, a complete success was not possible. The muse of dancing has no right to endeavor to annex the territory of her sisters, who are charged with the care of poetry and music. The several arts are strongest when each remains strictly within its own limitations. For example, program-music is not yet assured of its welcome, and program-dancing is far more difficult to follow with complete comprehension.

And there was a further defect in these efforts to revive the classic dances and to devise more modern interpretations of poetry and music. Success, if possible at all, would be possible only to a highly trained performer, mistress of every device of the terpsichorean art and elaborately schooled in pantomimic expression. Now, it is not unfair to say that no one of the performers of these so-called classic dances had undergone this severe schooling. No one of them had the lightness, the ease, the perfect mastery of method, the floating grace of the true dancer, who has been taught from childhood, until all the tricks of the craft are second nature. Without this arduous training any one who attempts an ambitious display can scarcely fail to reveal instantly the lamentable fact that she is not mistress of the technic of the art she has undertaken to practise. She does not know how to get her effects;

she does not even know what effects are possible. She is almost certain to appear amateurish, and she is likely to seem awkward also, not to say ungainly. As Pope put it tersely: "Those move easiest who have learned to dance."

These well-meant attempts to link dancing with poetry and music could be entirely satisfactory only to those who have given little consideration to dancing as an art, or who have small opportunity to see any really beautiful dancing. There is no wonder that any effort to spiritualize dancing, to give it a soul, to elevate it to the lofty level of the lyric, should be welcomed by those who have been disgusted by the ugly and vulgar high-kicking of the so-called pony ballets. The acrobatic contortions of these athletic performers were wholly without charm, as unalluring as they were violent. And equally unacceptable are the frequent exhibitions of toe-dancing, sheer gymnastic feats, difficult, indeed, but essentially uninteresting. Of a truth, these pony ballets on the one hand, and these toe-dancers on the other, are exponents of eccentricity. What they accomplish lies outside the true art of dancing. It is not inspired by Terpsichore, and the saddened muse must veil her face when she is forced to behold these crude exhibitions of misplaced energy.

II

The true art of dancing is entirely free from all apparent effort. No matter how difficult may be the feat that is accomplished, it must seem easy. Every gesture must be expressive, every movement must be beautiful, every step must have ease and lightness and grace. Forty years ago and more, the 'Black Crook' brought to America three or four dancers trained in the best schools of Europe—Bonfanti and Betty Rigl, Rita Sangalli and Morlacchi. One of this quartet, Rita Sangalli, was afterward the chief dancer at the Paris Opéra, where she was followed in time by Rosita Mauri, a dancer who added beauty of face and of form to a masterly accomplishment. They were all gifted pantomimists; they had all of them the perfection of technic; they were all of them capable of the most varied difficulties of the art; and they all of them vanquished these difficulties with unobtrusive ease. They had attained to that perfection of art, when the art itself is hidden, and when only the consummate result is visible. Each of them had absolute certainty of execution, and each of them could float across the stage the embodiment of grace, exquisite in its ethereal delicacy.

For those whose memories cannot recall the haunting remembrance of the days that are gone there is abundant compensation in the opportunity which has been afforded of late to behold the dancing of Mlle. Genée

and of Mlle. Pavlova. They are, at least, the equal of any of their predecessors, and it may be doubted whether Taglioni or Fanny Elssler surpassed them in mastery. They are the perfection of effortless ease; altho they suggest only the lightness of the butterfly, they have the steel strength of the gymnast. Behind their marvelous and bewildering accomplishment there is a native gift, rich and full; and there is also the utmost rigor and perseverance in training. What they are able to do with seeming spontaneity and with apparent freedom is the result of indefatigable industry and of merciless labor.

But tho this schooling sustains them, it is never paraded—indeed, it is scarcely perceived. There is not the faintest suggestion of hard work about their performances; there is nothing that hints at effort; their art is able to conceal itself absolutely, and to delight us only with the perfect result of their long apprenticeship. Capable of the most obstinate feats of strength and of agility, Mlle. Genée and Mlle. Pavlova never "show off"; they are never guilty of parading a difficulty for its own sake, and their conquest of technical obstacles serves only to support and intensify the continuous suggestion of aerial elevation and of ineffable lightness. It is to be noted, also, that as they scorn the task of the mere gymnast, they do not wear the scant costume of the acrobat; they are enveloped in ample draperies, which fall into lines of beauty with every movement.

Nothing more exquisite than their dancing has ever

been seen on the American stage. Theirs is the dancing which is graceful—which, indeed, is grace itself. Here is the art at its utmost possibility, purged of all its dross. When they are floating effortless thru space we cannot help recalling the possibly apocryphal anecdote which records the visit of Emerson and Margaret Fuller to the theater to see Fanny Elssler. They gazed with increasing delight, until at last Margaret Fuller could not contain her enthusiasm. She turned and said: "Ralph, this is poetry!" To which the philosopher is said to have responded: "Margaret, this is religion!"

Perfection is always rare, and there is now only one Mlle. Genée, and only one Mlle. Pavlova, as there was only one Rosita Mauri a quarter of a century ago. It is a pity that the Danish dancer has had to appear here in an ordinary musical show and not in a framework more worthy of her and of her art, and better fitted to display it. She has revealed herself only in two or three *entrées de ballet*, as the French term them —incidental dances; and she has not yet been seen here in a *ballet d'action*, a complete story told in pantomime. It was the poet, François Coppée, who devised the plot of the 'Korrigane' for Rosita Mauri; and he had had Théophile Gautier as a predecessor in the preparation of a ballet-libretto. All those who are interested in every manifestation of the art of the drama, must find pleasure in the *ballet d'action*, with its adroit commingling of dance and pantomime; it gives a delight possible to no other form of the drama; and at its

best it is more closely akin to pure poetry. Being her own manager, Mlle. Pavlova has been seen in a series of ballets more appropriate to her extraordinary gifts than those in which Mlle. Genée has been permitted to appear.

III

There was one scene of the 'Source,' a ballet popular at the Opéra in Paris during the exhibition of 1867, which must linger in the memory of all who had the good fortune to behold it—a scene so beautiful that it was borrowed for the 'White Fawn,' which was the successor of the 'Black Crook' here in the United States. It represented a silvery glade in the lone forest, with a mysterious lake, on the surface of which the spirits of the springtime came forth to disport themselves. It was a vision of airy grace and of haunting legend; and it is only one example of the poetic possibilities of the contribution of dance and pantomime in a coherent story. It may be well to recall the fact that the plots of these *ballets d'action* are often strong enough to enable them to serve as the basis of a libretto for an opera. It was a ballet of Scribe's, for example, which was taken for the book of the 'Somnambula'; and the book of the favorite opera 'Martha' began its existence as a libretto for a ballet.

While the *ballet d'action* affords the fullest opportunity for the perfect art of dancers like Rosita Mauri and Adeline Genée and Anna Pavlova, there are other forms not to be despised. Twenty-five years ago the

Italian Marenco brought out his stupendous 'Excelsior,' which was taken from Italy to Paris, then to New York, and finally to London. 'Excelsior' was an allegorical ballet; it represented the conflict of light and darkness, of progress and superstition, of invention and reaction. It filled a whole evening with spectacle and glitter and movement. It lacked the poetic simplicity of the 'Source' and of the 'Korrigane'; but it had other qualities of its own. What set it apart from all the ballets that had gone before was the subordination of the individual terpsichorean artist to the main body. Marenco employed the best dancers to be found in Italy, no doubt, but he did not rely on them so much as on the intricate and ingenious handling of the crowds of lesser dancers, by whom they were surrounded.

The novelty of 'Excelsior' and of the two or three gigantic Italian spectacles which were patterned upon it—'Messalina' and 'Sieba'—lay in the maneuvering of the masses, in the extraordinary skill with which squadrons of figures were made to charge across the stage and combine and melt into one another most unexpectedly and most delightfully. The whole stage was a blaze of artfully contrasted colors, and it was filled with a riot of motion and of glitter. And Marenco made use of male dancers far more abundantly than any of his predecessors, utilizing them to wear the more somber colors, to suggest a sterner vigor, and to emphasize a bolder contrast. He was responsible also for another novelty, often employed by others since;

he increased the height of his swerving lines of dancers, now and again, by mounting some of the figures on stands, and by putting revolving globes and iridescent banners into the hands of the men in the background.

It is the method of Marenco in 'Excelsior' which has been followed in the often pleasing ballets of the Hippodrome in New York. Really good soloists are now very scarce, even in Milan and in Vienna, long the nurseries of the ballet; and there seem to be none too many even in Petrograd, which has preserved and improved upon the traditions of Paris and Milan. And in the absence of accomplished soloists, the deviser of the ballets at the Hippodrome has been compelled to get along without them as best he could. He has been forced to rely on the maneuvering of masses of girls, possessed of only a rudimentary instruction in the elements of the terpsichorean art. In other words, he has had to make up in quantity for the absence of quality. But he has at his disposition an immense stage, across which he could set his squadrons marching and gliding and glittering. He could not count on the skill of his principals who were not expert enough to demand the attention of the spectators; but he could seek striking effects of light and color in the costumes, as he moved his masses to and fro and as he swung them together. If only there had been a little better training for the more prominent performers, the 'Four Seasons' would have been a most artistic entertainment, in spite of the absence of any single dancer of real distinction.

IV

The dearth of remarkable dancers is due to the inexorable fact that dancing is the most arduous of all the arts; its technic is the most difficult to acquire. Indeed, this technic can be acquired only in early youth, when the muscles are flexible and when they can be supplied at will. It is early in her teens that a dancer must begin her training if she aspires to eminence in the art. This training is very severe, and it must never be relaxed. Rubinstein used to say that if he omitted his practise for a single day he noticed it in his playing; if he omitted it two days his enemies found it out; and if he omitted it three days even his friends discovered it. The apprentice dancer can never omit a single day of hard and uninteresting toil. Incessant application, during all the long years of youth, is the price the ambitious beginner must pay for the mastery of her art. She can have no vacations; she can have few relaxations; she must keep herself constantly in training; she must be prepared to surrender many of the things which make life worth living. And it is no wonder that so few have the courage to persevere, and that there is only one Rosita Mauri, only one Adeline Genée, and only one Anna Pavlova in a quarter of a century. It is no wonder that the inventor of terpsichorean spectacles nowadays finds himself compelled to get along as best he can without a satisfactory soloist and to rely rather on his handling of a mass of inadequately trained dancers.

But even if the highly accomplished soloist, absolute mistress of all the possibilities of the art, is very rare, there are certain forms of dancing which do not demand this ultimate skill and which call for little more than grace and ease and charm, combined with a knowledge of the simpler steps. For example, the Spanish Carmencita, whose portraits by Mr. Sargent and by Mr. Chase now hang in the Luxembourg in Paris and in the Metropolitan Museum in New York —Carmencita was not a skilful dancer; she had undergone no inexorable schooling; she glided thru only a few elementary movements. But she made no effort; she did not pretend to what was not in her power; she was simple and unaffected. Her charm was not in her singing or in her dancing; it was in her personality, in the alluring and exotic suggestion of her individuality.

Nor could anybody venture to assert that Miss Kate Vaughan and Miss Letty Lind were dancers in the same class with Mauri, Genée, and Pavlova; but then they did not pretend to be. They knew only a few steps of obvious simplicity, and they displayed no unexpected dexterity. But the skirt-dance as they performed it was a memory of delight, with its grace and its ease, with its perfect rhythm and with the swish of its clinging draperies. It had a fascination of its own, quite different from the fascination of the more poetic and ethereal ballet-dancing of Rita Sangalli and Rosita Mauri. It was not of the stage exactly, but almost of the drawing-room. It gave the same pleasure which

we felt when we were privileged to behold a court minuet led by the late Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, who had been a dancer in the days of her youth. There is one perfect beauty of the best ballet-dancing and there are other beauties of different kinds in the skirt-dancing of the two Englishwomen and in the languorous swaying of the Spanish gipsy.

Beauty of yet another order there was in an exhibition which was called a dance, perhaps because there was no other word for it, but which demanded no skill with the feet and which necessitated rather strength in the arms. This was the luminous dance of Miss Loie Fuller, when she swirled voluminous and prolonged draperies in lights that came from above and from below, and from both sides—lights that changed by exquisite gradations from one tint to another, the figure of the dancer spinning around, now slowly and now swiftly, while her arms weaved fantastic circles in the air, revealing unexpected combinations of color, controlled by perfect taste. This may not have been dancing, by any strict definition of the word, but it was decorative, artistic, imaginative, and inexpressibly beautiful. It supplied a glimpse of unsuspected delight; and probably Terpsichore would not disdain to claim it for her own, however vigorously she might repel the suggestion that she had any responsibility for the violence of the toe-dances, for the vulgarity of the pony ballet, or for the ungainly caperings which pretend to recapture the free movements of the Greeks.

(1910–1915.)

XI

THE PRINCIPLES OF PANTOMIME

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I

In his suggestive study of ancient and modern drama, M. Émile Faguet dwells on the fact that the drama is the only one of the arts which can employ to advantage the aid of all the other arts. The muses of tragedy and comedy can borrow narrative from the muse of epic poetry and song from the muse of lyric poetry. They can avail themselves of oratory, music, and dancing. They can profit by the assistance of the architect, the sculptor, and the painter. They can draw on the co-operation of all the other arts without ceasing to be themselves and without losing any of their essential qualities. This was seen clearly by Wagner, who insisted that his music-dramas were really the art-work of the future, in that they were the result of a combination of all the arts. Quite possibly the Greeks had the same idea, since Athenian tragedy has many points of similarity to Wagner's music-drama; it had epic passages and a lyric chorus set to music; it called for stately dancing against an architectural background.

But altho the muses of the drama may invoke the help of their seven sisters, they need not make this appeal unless they choose. They can give their per-

formances on a bare platform, or in the open air, and thus get along without painting and architecture. They can disdain the support of song and dance and music. They can concentrate all their effort upon themselves and provide a play which is a play and nothing else. And this is what Ibsen has done in his somber social-dramas. 'Ghosts,' for example, is independent of anything extraneous to the drama. It is a play, only a play, and nothing more than a play.

Yet it is possible to reduce the drama to an even barer state than we find in Ibsen's gloomy tragedy in prose. Ibsen's characters speak; they reveal themselves in speech; and it is by words that they carry on the story. A story can be presented on the stage, however, without the use of words, without the aid of the human voice, by the employment of gesture only, by pure pantomime. No doubt, the drama makes a great sacrifice when it decides to do without that potent instrument of emotional appeal, the human voice; and yet it can find its profit, now and then, in this self-imposed deprivation. Certain stories there are, not many, and all of them necessarily simplified and made very clear, which gain by being bereft of the spoken word and by being presented only in the pantomime. And these stories, simple as they must be, if they are to be apprehended by sight alone without the aid of sound, are, nevertheless, capable of supporting an actual play with all the absolutely necessary elements of a drama.

In his interesting and illuminating volume on the

'Theory of the Theater,' Mr. Clayton Hamilton has a carefully considered definition of a play. He asserts that "a play is a story devised to be presented by actors on a stage before an audience." Perhaps it might be possible to amend this by saying "in a theater," instead of "on a stage," since we are now pretty certain that there was no stage in the Greek theater when Sophocles was writing for it. But this is but a trifling correction, and the definition as a whole is excellent. It includes every possible kind of dramatic entertainment, Greek tragedy and Roman comedy, medieval farce and modern melodrama, the music-drama of Wagner and the problem-play of Ibsen, the summer song-show and the college boy's burlesque. Obviously it includes the wordless play, the story devised to be presented on a stage and before an audience by actors who use gesture only and who do not speak.

In forgoing the aid of words the drama is only reducing itself to its absolutely necessary elements—a story, and a story which can be shown in action. It is not quite true that the skeleton of a good play is always a pantomime, since there are plays the plot of which cannot be conveyed to the audience except by actual speech. Yet some of the greatest plays have plots so transparent that the story is clear, even if we fail to hear what the actors are saying. It has been asserted that if 'Hamlet,' for example, were to be performed in a deaf-and-dumb asylum, the inmates would be able to understand it and to enjoy it. They would be deprived of the wonderful beauty of Shakspere's

verse, no doubt, and they would scarcely be able even to guess at the deeper significance of the philosophy which enriches the tragedy; but the story would unroll itself clearly before their eyes so that they could follow the succession of scenes with adequate understanding.

With his customary shrewdness and his usual gift of piercing to the center of what he was engaged in analyzing, Aristotle more than four thousand years ago saw the necessity of a neatly articulated plot. "If you string together a set of speeches," he said, "expressive of character and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play, which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents." No broader statement than this could be made as to the all-importance of the story itself—and pantomime is a story and nothing else, a story capable of being translated by the actions of the performers, without the aid of speech. Nor need we suppose that a play without words is necessarily devoid of poetry. There may be poetry in the "set of speeches expressive of character and well finished in point of thought and diction"; but there may be poetry also in the theme itself, in the actual story. 'Romeo and Juliet,' for example, is fundamentally poetic in its theme, and it retains its poetic quality even when it is made to serve as the libretto of an opera, as it would also retain this if it should be stripped bare to be presented in pantomime.

In a recent work on the 'Essentials of Poetry,' Professor William A. Neilson has made this clear: "Many a drama is a genuine poetic creation, altho it may be simple to the point of baldness in diction and exhibit the fundamental qualities of poetry only in the characterization and in the significance, proportion, and verisimilitude of the plot." That is to say, the drama can use two kinds of poetry, that which is internal and contained in the plot, and that which is external and confined to the language. It can employ

> jewels five-words long,
> That on the stretched forefinger of all Time
> Sparkle forever.

But it can also attain poetry without the use of superb and sonorous phrases and solely by its choice of theme. This is what the poets have often felt, and as a result French lyrists, like Théophile Gautier and François Coppée, have not disdained to compose librettos for pantomimic ballets, 'Giselle' and the 'Korrigane.' One of the most successful of the recent Russian ballets was simply a representation of Gautier's poetic fantasy, 'One of Cleopatra's Nights.'

II

Perhaps because the pantomime contains only the essential element of the drama—action—it has always been a popular form of play; and it appears very early in the history of the theater. Indeed, it seems

to be the sole type of play achievable by primitive man —if we may judge from observations made among savages who are still in the earlier periods of social development. Gesture precedes speech, and a pantomime was possible even before a vocabulary was developed. In the Aleutian Islands, for example, the pantomime is the only form of play known. One of the little plays of the islanders has been described. It was acted by two performers only, one representing a hunter, and the other a bird. The hunter hesitates but finally kills the bird with an arrow; then he is seized with regret that he has slain so noble a bird; whereupon the bird revives and turns into a beautiful woman who falls into the hunter's arms. This is the simplest of stories, but it lends itself to effective acting; it is capable of being interpreted adequately by means of gesture alone; and it is just the kind of play which would appeal to an Aleutian audience, being wholly within their experience and their apprehension.

Pantomime flourished in Rome and in Constantinople in the sorry years of the decline and fall of the empire; and it was then low and lascivious. A great part of the fierce hostility to the theater displayed by the Fathers of the Christian Church was due to the fact that the only drama of which they had any knowledge was pantomime of a most objectionable character, offensive in theme and even more offensive in presentation. With the conversion of the empire to Christianity, pantomimes of this type, appealing only to lewd fellows of the baser sort, was very properly pro-

hibited. But pantomime of another type sprang up in the Middle Ages in the Christian churches to exemplify and to make visible to the ignorant congregations, certain episodes of sacred history. In the Renascence dumb-shows were represented before monarchs, at their weddings and at their stately entrances into loyal cities. And dumb-shows were often employed in the Elizabethan stage, sometimes as prologs to the several acts, as in 'Gorboduc,' for example, and sometimes within the play itself, as in 'Hamlet.'

In the eighteenth century pantomime had a double revival, in France and in England. In France, Noverre elevated the *ballet d'action*, that is to say, the story told in pantomime and adorned with dances. Sometimes these *ballets d'action* were in several acts, relying for interest on the simple yet ingenious plot, and only decorated, so to speak, with occasional dances. From Noverre and from France the tradition of the pantomime with interludes of dancing, spread at first to Italy and Austria, and later to Russia.

In England the development of pantomime was upon different lines, due to the influence of the Italian comedy-of-masks, with its unchanging figures of Pantaleone, Columbina, and Arlecchino. These figures were still further simplified; and to Pantaloon, Columbine, and Harlequin there was added the characteristically British figure of the Clown. The most famous impersonator of the clown was Grimaldi, whose memoirs were edited by Charles Dickens. The mantle of Grimaldi fell upon an American, G. L. Fox, whose

greatest triumph, in the late sixties, was in a pantomime called 'Humpty-Dumpty'—the riming prolog of which was written by A. Oakey Hall (then Tweed's mayor of New York). G. L. Fox and his brother, C. K. Fox (who was the inventor of the comic scenes), had been preceded in America by a family of French pantomimists known as the Ravels; and they were followed by the family known as the Hanlon-Lees, who had originally been acrobats, and who appeared in a French play, in which the other characters spoke while the Hanlon-Lees expressed themselves only in gesture. Here again Scribe had been before them, with his libretto for the opera of 'Masaniello,' in which there is a principal part for a pantomimic actress, Fenella. And when the great French actor, Frédéric Lemaître, had lost his voice by overstrain, Dennery wrote a play for him, the 'Old Corporal,' in which he appeared as a soldier of Napoleon's Old Guard, who had been stricken dumb during the retreat from Russia.

This exploit of Frédéric Lemaître's is not as extraordinary as it seems. A truly accomplished actor ought to be able to forgo the aid of speech. Even in our modern plays gesture is more significant than speech. To place the finger on the lips is more effective than to say "Hush!" The tendency of the modern drama on our amply lighted picture-frame stage is to subordinate the mere words to the expressive action. In Mr. Gillette's 'Secret Service,' for example, the impression is sometimes made rather by gesture than by speech; and a large portion of the most effective scene,

that where the hero is wounded while he is sending a telegraph message, is presented in pantomime with little assistance from actual dialog. Similar effects are to be found in many of Mr. Belasco's plays, especially in the 'Darling of the Gods.' In all good acting the gesture precedes the word; and often the gesture makes the word itself unnecessary, because it has succeeded in conveying the impression and in making the full effect by itself, so that the spoken phrase lags superfluous.

III

In France in the final decades of the nineteenth century there was a wide-spread revival of interest in pantomime, where the art had been dormant since the days of Deburau. A society was formed for its encouragement, and a host of little wordless plays was the result. The most ambitious effort was the 'Enfant Prodigue,' a genuine comedy in three acts, by M. Michel Carré, with music by M. Alfred Wormser. This wordless play on the perennially attractive theme of the Prodigal Son proved to be the modern masterpiece of pantomime. It was limpidly clear in its story; it was ingeniously put together in its plot; it combined humor and pathos; and it was devoid of the acrobatic features and of the slap-stick fun which have generally been considered the inevitable accessories of pantomime. We had brought before us the dull and prim home life of old Pierrot and of his wife, and we were made to

behold the impatience of young Pierrot with this prim dullness. We saw the Prodigal rob his father and go forth in search of pleasure. In the second act we were witnesses of the sad results of the pleasure young Pierrot had sought superabundantly, and we discovered that he had spent his money and that he was capable of descending to marked cards to win more gold to satisfy the caprices of the woman who had fascinated him. We saw his return with his ill-gotten gains after his charmer had been tempted to go off with a wealthier man. And in the third act we were taken back to the home of his broken-hearted parents; and we witnessed the Prodigal's return, poverty-stricken, disenchanted, and reformed. His mother takes him to her arms; but his father is obdurate. Then we hear the fife and drum afar off, and young Pierrot, if he has lived unworthily for himself, can at least die worthily for his country. So the old father relents and bestows his blessing on the erring son as the boy goes forth to war.

The art of the 'Enfant Prodigue' was at once delicate and firm; and its popularity was not confined to France. Here was a true play, moving to tears as well as to laughter, holding the interest by a human story of universal appeal. It was taken across the Channel from Paris to London, and from London it was taken across the ocean to New York. Augustin Daly, always on the alert for novelty, brought it out at his own theater, first with his own company, and then a little later with a French company. Excellent as was the

performance of the French company, two characters were as well sustained by the American company. Charles Leclercq appeared as old Pierrot, and he had had in his youth experience in pantomime in England. Mrs. G. H. Gilbert appeared as Mrs. Pierrot, and in her youth she had been a ballet dancer, and had taken part in pantomimes. To these two performers the principles of the art of gesture were perfectly familiar; and it was a constant delight to follow the dexterity and the adequacy of their gestures. But Miss Rehan, who appeared as the Prodigal Son, had had no pantomimic experience, and she was not able to acquire the art offhand. In dozens of dramas she had revealed herself as an actress, not only of great personal charm, but also of great histrionic skill. Merely as an actress she was incomparably superior to the impersonator of the Prodigal Son in the French company; but merely as a pantomimist she was inferior. More than once she appeared as if she wanted to speak, failing because she was deprived of voice. Her gestures seemed like afterthoughts; they lacked spontaneity and inevitability. She suggested at moments that she was a poor dumb boy gasping for words.

Now, the convention underlying pantomime is that we are beholding a story carried on by a race of beings whose natural method of communicating information and ideas is gesture—just as the convention of opera is that we are beholding a story carried on by a race of beings whose natural method of communicating information and ideas is song. No such races of beings

ever existed; but we must admit the existence of such races as a condition precedent to our enjoyment of pantomime and of opera. The spectators must accept the art as it is, and the performers must refrain from any suggestion that they would speak if they could. This underlying convention was viciously violated in "Professor" Reinhardt's overpraised 'Sumurun,' when the Hunchback gives a shriek of horror as he sees the woman he loves in the arms of another man. It is viciously violated again in the same play when Sumurun and two attendants are heard singing. If Sumurun can sing, why can she not speak? If the Hunchback can shriek and sob audibly, why is he ordinarily reduced to mere gesture?

'Sumurun' was provided with a plot devised by Herr Freksa, and with music composed by Herr Hollaender; and it was produced by "Professor" Max Reinhardt. The story was a little complicated, and it lacked the transparent simplicity of the 'Enfant Prodigue,' as it lacked also the broad humanity of the French piece. Its chief claim to attention was that it is an amusing spectacle, sensual as well as sensuous. Its humor had a Teutonic heaviness in marked contrast with the Gallic lightness of the 'Enfant Prodigue.' "Professor" Reinhardt sought eccentricity rather than originality, queerness rather than beauty. His effort was directed to the achieving of something unexpected and something different rather than to the attaining of something good in itself, or of something poetic. Esthetically, musically, dramatically the German pan-

tomime was pitiably inferior to the French; and yet so potent and so permanent is the appeal of the wordless play that 'Sumurun' pleased a host of younger playgoers, not old enough to be able to recall the 'Enfant Prodigue' or 'Humpty-Dumpty,' the Hanlon-Lees, or the Ravels.

IV

'Sumurun,' like the 'Enfant Prodigue,' was supported by its music, which sustained the gestures and which sometimes suggested more than gesture alone can do. In the 'Enfant Prodigue,' for example, one of the most amusing scenes is that in which the elderly rich man tenders his affections to the charmer who has fascinated the Prodigal Son. She insists upon marriage. It would be difficult to convey this idea in pure pantomime. So she points to the fourth finger of the left hand, and the orchestra plays the familiar Wedding March, thus instantly conveying the idea. When she goes off to get her bonnet, the elderly suitor repeats her gesture, and the orchestra repeats the Wedding March, whereupon he winks and shakes his head, giving us clearly to understand that his intentions are strictly dishonorable.

'Sumurun' is rather a spectacle than a play; and therefore it makes comparatively little use of the conventionalized gestures which may be described as the accepted vocabulary of pantomime, and which have been developed by the followers of Noverre in France

and in Italy. This vocabulary of gesture is only a codification of the signs which we naturally make—shaking the head for "no," nodding for "yes," and laying a finger on the lips for "hush!" The basis of any such vocabulary must be the series of gestures by the aid of which man has always expressed his emotions. This is why the traditional gestures of theatrical pantomime do not, and indeed cannot, differ greatly from any natural sign language. The universality of this pantomimic vocabulary was curiously evidenced forty years ago when Morlacchi, the Italian dancer, married Texas Jack, the American scout. She had been trained in pantomime at La Scala, in Milan, and he had acquired the sign language of the Plains Indians. And they found that they could hold converse with each other in pantomime, she using the Italian-French gestures and he employing the gestures of the redskins.

(1912.)

XII

THE IDEAL OF THE ACROBAT

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I

When Huckleberry Finn went to the circus he sneaked in under the tent when the watchman was absent. He had money in his pocket, but he feared that he might need this. "I ain't opposed to spending money on circuses," he confessed, "when there ain't no other way, but there ain't no use in *wasting* it on them." In spite of the fact that he had not paid for his seat, and that he was thereby released from the necessity of getting his money's worth, he declared cheerfully that "it was a real bully circus. It was the splendidest sight that ever was, when they all come riding in, two and two, a gentleman and a lady, side by side, the men just in their drawers and undershirts, and no shoes nor stirrups, and resting their hands on their thighs, easy and comfortable . . . and every lady with a lovely complexion, and perfectly beautiful, and looking like a gang of real sure-enough queens. . . . And then, one by one, they got up and stood, and went a-weaving around the ring so gentle and wavy and graceful, the men looking ever so tall and airy and straight, with their heads bobbing and skimming along, away up there under the tent roof, and every lady's

rose-leaf dress flapping soft and silky around her hips, and she looking like the most loveliest parasol."

However much Huck was impressed by the Grand Entry, he seems to have been more pleased by the surprising act, traditionally known as 'Pete Jenkins,' and never better described than by Mark Twain's youthful hero. "And by and by a drunk man tried to get into the ring—said he wanted to ride; said he could ride as well as anybody that ever was. They argued and tried to keep him out, but he wouldn't listen, and the whole show came to a standstill. Then the people began to holler at him and make fun of him. . . . So then the ring-master he made a little speech, and said he hoped there wouldn't be no disturbance, and if the man would promise he wouldn't make no more trouble, he would let him ride, if he thought he could stay on the horse. . . . The minute he was on the horse he began to rip and tear and jump and cavort around . . . the drunk man hanging onto his neck, and his heels flying in the air every jump. . . . But pretty soon he struggled up astraddle and grabbed the bridle, a-reeling this way and that; and the next minute he sprung up and stood! and the horse a-going like a house afire, too. He just stood there, a-sailing around as easy and as comfortable as if he warn't ever drunk in his life—and then he begun to pull off his clothes and sling them. He shed them so thick they kind of clogged up the air, and altogether he shed seventeen suits. And then, here he was, slim and handsome, and dressed the grandiest and prettiest you ever saw, and he lit into that horse and

made him hum—and finally skipped off and made his bow and danced off to the dressing-room, and everybody just a-howling with pleasure and astonishment. Then the ring-master, he see how he had been fooled, and he was the sickest ring-master you ever see, I reckon. Why, it was one of his own men! He had got up that joke all out of his own head, and never let on to nobody!"

Yet in this enjoyment of a practical joke, dear to every boy's heart, Huck did not fail to note that the skilful rider who had pretended to be intoxicated, stood up at last, "slim and handsome." Even Huck Finn, neglected son of the town-drunkard, was quick to respond to the appeal of the supple and well-proportioned figure of the rider after the superimposed clothing had been discarded, just as he had felt the attraction of the varied colors and the graceful evolutions of the Grand Entry. At bottom, it was the beauty of the display that he appreciated most keenly. By the side of this passage from Mark Twain's masterpiece may be set a passage from Mr. Hamlin Garland's best story, 'Rose of Dutcher's Coolly,' in which we find recorded the impressions of a girl of about the same age, the daughter of a hard-working Wisconsin farmer. Rose had never seen a circus before, and even the morning street parade fired her imagination.

"On they came, a band leading the way. Just behind, with glitter of lance and shine of helmet, came a dozen knights and fair ladies riding spirited chargers. They all looked strange and haughty, and sneeringly

indifferent to the cheers of the people. The women seemed small and firm and scornful, and the men rode with lances uplifted, looking down at the crowd with a haughty droop in their eyelids." Rose "did not laugh at the clown jigging by in a pony-cart, for there was a face between her and all that followed—the face of a bare-armed knight, with brown hair and a curling mustache, whose proud neck had a curve in it as he bent his head to speak to his rearing horse. . . . His face was fine, like pictures she had seen."

In the afternoon Rose attended the performance in the tent and "sat in a dream of delight as the band began to play. . . . Then the music struck into a splendid gallop and out from the curtained mysteries beyond, the knights and ladies darted, two by two, in glory of crimson and gold, and green and silver. At their head rode the man with the brown mustache." A little later "six men dressed in tights of blue and white and orange ran into the ring, and her hero led them. He wore blue and silver, and on his breast was a rosette. He looked a god to her. His naked limbs, his proud neck, the lofty carriage of his head, made her shiver with emotion. They all came to her, lit by the white radiance; they were not naked, they were beautiful. . . . They invested their nakedness with something which exalted them. They became objects of luminous beauty to her, tho she knew nothing of art. To see him bow and kiss his fingers to the audience was a revelation of manly grace and courtesy." When at last the show was over and Rose went out into the

open air, "it seemed strange to see the same blue sky arching the earth; things seemed exactly the same, and yet Rose had grown older. She had developed immeasurably in those few hours." As they looked back at the tents, Rose knew that "something sweet and splendid and mystical was passing out of her life after a few hours' stay there. Her feeling of loss was none the less real because it was indefinable to her."

She never saw this acrobat again, and after a little while she knew that she did not want to see him. He lingered in her memory, a vision from another world than any she had ever dreamed—a world of heroic romance and of lofty idealism. "She began to live for him, her ideal. She set him on high as a being to be worshiped, as a man fit to be her judge. In the days and weeks which followed she asked herself: 'Would he like me to do this?' When the sunset was very beautiful, she thought of him. . . . Vast ambitions began in her. . . . She would do something great for his sake. . . . In short, she consecrated herself to him as to a king, and seized upon every chance to educate herself to be worthy of him." And while her soul was thus expanding under the influence of this poetic idealization of a manly figure revealed to her only for two or three hours, all unconsciously she patterned her movements upon his. She walked with a free stride, and her body came to have the easy carriage of the athlete. Later, when Rose had matured into a beauty of her own, she confessed to an elder woman this sentimental awakening in her early girlhood; and it became

evident to her friend that "the beautiful poise of the head, and supple swing of the girl's body was in part due to the suggestion of the man's perfect grace."

II

To the realistic imagination of the boy, Huck, the circus was a fleeting spectacle of beauty; and to the romantic imagination of the girl, Rose, it lingered long as a dream of poetry. Young Americans, both of them, living in these modern days when the human form, male and female, is decorously dissembled and disguised by ugly and complicated garments, they had been allowed by the exceptional freedom of the circus to recapture something of the frank and innocent delight of the Greeks in the beauty of the body, in its beauty merely as a body, and not as the habitation of the mind and the soul. Alert as the Greeks were to admire the deeds of the mind—no race ever more so—they were no less keen in their appreciation of the things of the body. They were glad to crown the poet for his lyric conquest, but they bestowed the laurel wreath also on the athlete who had won to the front in the race. The lofty nobility of their tragedy testifies to the clarity of their intelligence; and the supreme power of their sculpture is evidence of their loving study of the human body, bearing itself in beauty, clad in few and flowing garments which allowed the eye to follow the free play of the muscles.

It is only in the circus or the gymnasium or the

swimming-pool that we moderns are permitted to behold what was a daily spectacle to the Greeks; and it is because the circus preserves for us this occasional privilege that it deserves to survive. The jocularities of the clowns, the intricate evolutions of the trained animals, the golden glitter of the gorgeous cavalcades —all these are but the casual accompaniments of the essential privilege of the circus to present to us a succession of men and women, with their bodies in perfect condition, to exhibit to us that purely physical beauty which we are ever in danger of overlooking or even forgetting. These acrobats, slim and handsome, as Huck Finn found them, in their "shirts and drawers," may display their daring and their grace, standing on a circling steed or swinging from a flying trapeze, revolving on a horizontal bar or building themselves up into human pyramids on the bark of the arena; but, except for the sake of variety, the way in which they may choose to exhibit their skill and to show themselves is unimportant. What is important is that we may have the shifting spectacle of the human body in the highest condition of physical efficiency, delighting our eyes by obedience to the everlasting laws of beauty.

While the Greeks had far more opportunities than are vouchsafed to us moderns to behold the human body exhibiting its strength and its skill in graceful play, we have the advantage that many of the most effective exercises are latter-day inventions. It seems unlikely that the Athenians and the Spartans, even tho they

were horsemen, had attained to the art of bareback riding; they may have bestraddled a saddleless steed, but they had not learned how to stand on his back, and to turn somersets in time with the stride of the horse. It is, of course, possible that they were familiar with this, but no sculpture and no vase-painting, no anecdote in the works of the prose-writers, and no line of the lyrists survives to authorize us to believe it. And it is fairly certain, also, that they lacked the horizontal bar, which affords limitless possibilities to the adventurous acrobat of our own times, both when it is erected singly and when it is combined in sets of three, either fixed in the arena or raised aloft in the air to produce the appearance of a remoter ethereality.

The trapeze has a name of Greek origin, and it was possibly known to the Greeks. But the Greeks did not foresee the full possibilities of the trapeze, since its most startling utilization, the feat known as the Flying Trapeze, was invented by the French acrobat, Léotard, only a little later than the middle of the nineteenth century. The Flying Trapeze is the ultimate achievement of acrobatic art, and it demands the utmost combination of skilful strength and of easy grace. It was a feat that the Greeks would have appreciated and enjoyed, since it demanded and disclosed the perfection of physical courage and of physical skill. Of late, the Flying Trapeze has been complicated and doubled in difficulty by the introduction of a second performer, who at first makes the leap simultaneously with his partner, and afterward separates from him and springs

thru the air to the trapeze which his associate has just abandoned, the pair thus floating past each other in mid-air. In this more elaborated form the task is more perilous, no doubt, and far less easy of accomplishment; but it cannot be achieved with quite the same graceful mastery as when a single performer seems to glide ethereally from bar to bar, as tho it was impossible for him to fall or to fail to catch his almost invisible support. This graceful mastery was the most marked characteristic of Léotard, the original inventor of the Flying Trapeze; and it may be doubted whether any of those who have followed the path he traced thru the air, and who have vanquished difficulties beyond those which he conquered, have been able to outdo him in the abiding essential of grace.

III

The overcoming of difficulty is one of the elements of the pleasure which we take in any art, and part of our enjoyment of a sonnet, for example, must be ascribed to the apparent ease with which the poet is able to express his thought, amply and completely, within the rigid limitations of his fourteen lines, with their prescribed arrangement of five or six rimes. But our delight is diminished if we are made conscious of the effort it has cost the artist to attain his aim. Many a later performer on the Flying Trapeze let us see that the feats he is attempting are so difficult that they cannot be accomplished without obvious effort.

That is to say, we are made aware that the acrobat is exhibiting a "stunt," and this is bad art. Difficulty overcome is worth while only when it is overcome seemingly without any strain, and when art is sufficient to conceal itself. However difficult the artist's achievement may be, its charm is doubled if he can make it appear to be easy.

It happens that I am able to bring his personal testimony to the fact that this was the principle which always governed Léotard himself. When the French gymnast paid his only visit to the United States, more than forty years ago, he used to practise in a gymnasium which I also frequented. He spoke no English, and I had a little school-boy French, so that a certain intimacy sprang up. One day Léotard asked me to swing a trapeze for him, and he sprang off and caught it with a single hand, and then as the second trapeze returned he twisted and grasped the first trapeze again with one hand. This evoked from me an immediate exclamation of astonishment and admiration at the startling conquest of difficulty, and it was followed by the natural question why so extraordinary a feat had never been exhibited in public. Léotard explained that the leaps from trapeze to trapeze with the aid of one hand only must be lopsided, since the body is inevitably more or less twisted, and he added that as there was an unavoidable and ungraceful wrenching of the person, he had determined never to exhibit this feat in public, difficult as it might be.

But altho Léotard was not willing to perform in

public with only one hand, it was a most invaluable exercise in private. His ability to accomplish his leaps thus handicapped gave him a redoubled confidence when he was using both of his hands. That he was right in resisting the temptation to startle the spectators by a "stunt" of surprising difficulty is beyond question. It could not be made to seem easy, and it could not be accomplished with grace. Therefore it was not fit for exhibition, even tho Léotard might feel sure that he could do it without risk of failure. Here the French acrobat revealed himself as bound by the eternal principles which underlie all the arts, that of the acrobat no less than those of the painter and the poet. There is lack of art in the performances of many acrobats of remarkable skill, who attempt feats which they are not always certain of achieving. Indeed, they are sometimes willing to profit by this very uncertainty. They fail the first time of trying, and even the second, and these failures serve the purpose of advertising to the spectators the difficulty of the task they have undertaken. Then the third time, or the fourth, they succeed, whereupon they reap the unworthy reward of applause from the unthinking.

The artist should never let us see his failures. If he is not certain that he can perform what he promises, then he had better refrain from the attempt. It was in the same winter that Léotard was in New York, in the late sixties of the nineteenth century, that the Hanlon Brothers paid one of their welcome visits to America. The Hanlons they were then, and they

were acrobats pure and simple, altho later, when they called themselves the Hanlon-Lees, they had become pantomimists. As acrobats they held fast to the same principles which governed Léotard in his performances. They insisted upon certainty of execution; they never failed to perform the feat they set out to accomplish, and to perform it successfully the first time they attempted it. And no matter how difficult the feat might be, or how novel or how effective, if they could not attain absolute certainty of execution, they refrained from setting it before the public. I was told at the time that there were two or three surprising and alluring exercises which the Hanlons had invented themselves, which they practised laboriously and faithfully all that winter, and which they wisely refrained from ever putting on their program because they were never able to assure themselves of a uniformly successful result. They could do any one of these feats four times out of five, but the fifth time there would be a miscalculation of energy, and the attempt would have to be repeated. And they were unwilling to let the public witness any performance of theirs which was not perfect in its execution.

IV

Here again the modern acrobat, who is guided by a real feeling for his art, is in accord with the principles which the Greeks obeyed. In Attic tragedy, for example, there are no exhibitions of violence, no scuffles,

and no assassinations, and this is not so much because the Greeks shrank from scenes of blood, as some critics have vainly contended, but rather because the actors in the Attic drama were raised on thick boots and were topped by towering masks, which made it almost impossible for them to take part in episodes of vigorous action, in hand-to-hand struggles, in murders before the eyes of the spectators, without danger of displacing the mask, and thereby distracting the attention of the audience from the immediate purpose of the dramatic poet. What could not be done gracefully the Greeks refrained from attempting. The exhibition of difficulty for the sake of difficulty, still more the failure to accomplish a "stunt" for the sake of calling attention to its difficulty—these things the Greeks abhorred. They would as surely have disapproved of the misguided artifices of the acrobats who make a practise of failing once or twice in order to multiply the immediate effect of their ultimate success as they would reprove the exhibition of a difficulty conquered for its own sake. It is only in the best acrobatic performances that we moderns are privileged to perceive what was a constant delight to the Greeks—the beauty of the human form, in its finest physical perfection, certain of its strength and easy in its grace.

(1912.)

XIII

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF NEGRO-MINSTRELSY

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF NEGRO-MINSTRELSY

I

Of all the varied and manifold kinds of theatrical entertainment negro-minstrelsy is the only one which is absolutely native to these States, and the only one which could not have come into existence anywhere else in the civilized world. Here in America alone has the transplanted African been brought into intimate contact with the transplanted European. Other nations may have disputed our claim to the invention of the steamboat and the telegraph, but negro-minstrelsy is as indisputably due to American inventiveness as the telephone itself. Here in the United States it had its humble beginnings; here it expanded and flourished for many years; from here it was exported to Great Britain, where it established itself for many seasons; from here it has made sporadic excursions into France and into Germany; and here at last it has fallen into a decline and a degeneracy and a decay which seem to doom it to a speedy extinction. Its life was little longer than that vouchsafed to man, threescore years and ten, for it was born in the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, and in the second decade of the twentieth it lingers superfluous on the stage, with none to do it reverence.

Time was when the negro minstrels held possession of three or four theaters in the single city of New York, and when a dozen or more troops were traveling from town to town; and now they have long ago surrendered their last hall in the metropolis, and only a solitary company winds its lonely way from theater to theater thruout the United States. The few surviving practitioners of the art are reduced to the presentation of brief interludes in the all-devouring variety-shows, or to the impersonation of sparse negro characters in occasional comedies. The Skidmore Guards, who paraded so gaily at Harrigan and Hart's, are disbanded now these many years; Johnny Wild of joyous memory is no more, and Sweatnam, bereft of his fellows in sable drollery, is seen only in a chance comedy like 'Excuse Me,' or the 'County Chairman.' George Christy and Dan Emmett and Dan Bryant have gone and left only fading memories of their breezy songs, their nimble dances, and their flippant quips. Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth blacked up more than once, Joseph Jefferson and Barney Williams besmeared themselves with burnt cork on occasion; but it is not by these darker episodes in their artistic careers that they are now recalled, and the leading actors of to-day think scorn of negro-minstrelsy—whenever they deign to give it a thought. And yet it must be noted frankly that when The Lambs wanted to raise money for their new club-house, they did not disdain the art of the negro minstrel, and more than twoscore of them went forth to conquer, willingly disguised in the uniform

blackness assumed long ago by George Christy and Dan Bryant.

It is to be hoped that some devoted historian will come forward before it is too late and tell us the history of this very special form of theatrical art, the only one indigenous to our soil. Indeed, now that our American universities are paying attention to the drama, what more alluring theme for the dissertation demanded of all candidates for the doctorate of philosophy than an inquiry into the rise and fall of negro-minstrelsy? In the late Laurence Hutton's conscientious and entertaining volume on the 'Curiosities of the American Stage,' there is a chapter in which the subject is treated historically, altho the chronicler wasted much of his precious space in considering the succession of sable characters in the regular drama—Shakspere's Othello, Southerne's Oroonoko, Bickerstaff's Mungo, Boucicault's Pete (in the 'Octoroon'), Uncle Tom, Topsy, Eliza, and their companions (in the undying dramatization of Mrs. Stowe's story). These were all parts in plays wherein white characters were prominent. The first performer of a song-and-dance, that is of a sketch in which the darky performer was sufficient unto himself, and was deprived of any support from persons of another complexion, seems to have been "Jim Crow" Rice—the title of whose lively lyric survives in the name bestowed upon the cars reserved for colored folk on certain Southern railroads. Rice found his pattern in an old negro who did a peculiar step after he had sung to a tune of his own contriving:

Wheel about, turn about;
Do jus' so:
An' ebery time I turn about,
I jump Jim Crow.

Rice carried Jim Crow to England, and he made a specialty of dandy darkies. But he was not the discoverer of negro-minstrelsy, as we know it, altho he blazed the trail for it. Indeed, it was quite probably due to the influence of Rice and his darky dandies that the negro minstrels confined their efforts to the imitation of the town negro rather than of the plantation negro, the field-hand of the Uncle Remus type. Rice first impersonated Jim Crow in the late twenties, and it was in the middle of the thirties that he went to England. And it was in the early forties that Dan Emmett, Frank Brower, Billy Whitlock, and Dick Pelham happened to meet by accident in a New York boarding-house, and amused themselves with songs accompanied by the banjo, the tambourine, and the bones. Pleased by the result of their exercises, they appeared together at a benefit, and negro-minstrelsy was born. At first there was no differentiation into Interlocutors and End-men; they all took an equal share in the more or less improvised dialog; they sang, and they played, and they danced the 'Essence of Old Virginny.'

Probably Emmett began early to provide new tunes for them. He was the composer of 'Old Dan Tucker' and the 'Boatman's Dance,' of 'Walk Along, John,' and 'Early in the Morning,' and one walk-around

which he devised in the late fifties for Bryant's Minstrels, 'Dixie,' was introduced by Mrs. John Wood into a burlesque, which she was playing in New Orleans, just before the outbreak of the Civil War. The sentiment and the tune took the fancy of the ardent Louisianans, and they carried it with them into the Confederate army, where it soon established itself as the war-song of the South. And then when Richmond had fallen at last, Lincoln ordered the bands of the victorious army to play 'Dixie,' with the wise explanation that as we had captured the Southern capital, we had also captured the Southern song. And 'Dixie,' which had begun life so humbly as a walk-around in a minstrel-show in New York, bids fair to survive indefinitely as the musical testimony to the fact that the cruel war is over, and that these States are now one nation.

II

It was only a year or two after the quartet of Emmett, Brower. Whitlock, and Pelham had shown the possibilities of the new form of amusement that troops of negro minstrels began to supply an entire evening's amusement. The regulation First Part was devised with its curving row of vocalists, instrumentalists, and comedians. The dignified Interlocutor took his place in the middle of the semicircle, and uttered the time-honored phrase: "Gentlemen, be seated. We will commence with the overture." Bones captured the

chair at one end, and Tambo pre-empted that on the other; and they began their wordy skirmish with the Middleman, in which that pompous presiding officer always got the worst of it. This device for immediate and boisterous laughter, this putting down of the Middleman by the End-man, the negro minstrels appear to have borrowed from the circus, where the clown is also permitted always to discomfit the stiff and stately ring-master.

But altho the minstrels may have taken over this effective trick from the circus, with which some of the earlier performers had had intimate relations, the trick itself is of remote antiquity. The side-splitting colloquy of the End-man with the Middleman may be exactly like the interchange of merry jests between the clown and the ring-master, yet it is far older than the modern circus. It existed in Paris, for example, in the sixteenth century, when the quack doctor was accompanied by his jack-pudding. Many of the dialogs heard on the Pont-Neuf between Mondor and Tabarin have been preserved, and the method is precisely that of the dialogs between ring-master and clown, Interlocutor and End-man, even to the persistent repetition of the question which contains the catch. "Master," Tabarin would begin, "can you tell me which is the more generous, a man or a woman?" And the quack doctor would solemnly reply: "Ah, Tabarin, that is a question which has been greatly debated by the philosophers of antiquity, and they have been unable to decide which is truly the more generous, a man or a

woman." Then Tabarin would briskly retort: "Never mind the old philosophers. I can tell you." And with great contempt the ponderous quack doctor would return: "What, Tabarin, do you mean to say that you can tell us which is the more generous, a man or a woman." Tabarin promptly responded that he could. "Then," asked Mondor, "pray do so. Which is the more generous, a man or a woman?" And thereupon, to the great disgust of Mondor, Tabarin would proffer his ribald explanation. Unfortunately the explanation he gave is frankly too ribald to be given here, for nowadays we are more squeamish than the idlers who gathered around the quack doctor's platform in Paris three or four centuries ago. The dialogs of Mondor and Tabarin were brief enough, but they often made up for their brevity in their breadth.

This kind of catch-question was known in England, under Elizabeth, as "selling a bargain," and it is not infrequent in the plays of the time. It will be found more than once in earlier plays of Shakspere; for example, when his "clowns" (as the low-comedy characters were then called) were allowed to run on at their own sweet will. Not a little of the dialog of the two Dromios is closely akin in its method to the interchange of question and answer between the Interlocutor and the End-man. We may be sure this method of evoking laughter was employed also by the improvising comedians of the Italian comedy-of-masks, with which negro-minstrelsy has other points of resemblance. It must have been popular with the wandering glee-men

of the rude Middle Ages; and now that negro-minstrelsy is disappearing and now that our circuses have burgeoned into three rings under a tent too vast for any merely verbal repartees, it has not departed from among us, since it still survives as the staple of the so-called "sidewalk conversationalists" who swap personalities in our superabundant variety-shows.

We do not know with historic certainty how soon the First Part crystallized into the form which has long been traditional—the opening overture, the catch-questioning of End-man and Middleman, the comic songs of Bones and Tambo in turn, the sentimental ballads by the silver-throated vocalists, and the concluding walk-around. The rest of the evening's entertainment never took on any definite framework, altho the final item on the program was likely to be a piece of some length, often a burlesque of a serious drama then popular, and this little play "enlisted the whole strength of the company." Between the stately First Part and the more pretentious terminating sketch, the minstrels presented a variety of acts in which the several members exhibited their specialities. A clog-dance was always in order—altho the mechanical precision of this form of saltatorial exercise was wholly foreign to the characteristics of the actual negroes whom the minstrels were supposed to be representing. A stump-speech was certain of a warm reception—altho this again departed from the true negro tradition, and, in fact, often degenerated into frank burlesque, wholly unrelated to the realities of life. Sketches, like those

which Rice had earlier composed for his own acting, were likely to have a little closer relation to the genuine darky.

Yet here again the negro minstrel was not avid of overt originality. He was willing to find his profit in the past and to translate into negro dialect any farce, however ancient, which might contain comic situations or humorous characters that could be twisted to suit his immediate purpose. He seized upon the ingenious plots of certain of the pantomimes brought to America from France half a century ago by the Ravels. And on occasion he went, unwittingly, still further afield for his prey. There is in print, in a collection of so-called Ethiopian drama, an amusing sketch, entitled the 'Great Mutton Trial'; and the remote source of this is to be sought in the oldest and best farce which has survived in French literature. 'Maître Pierre Pathelin' is now acted occasionally by the Comédie-Française in Paris, in a version which preserves its original flavor; but in the eighteenth century an adaptation, made by Brueys and Palaprat, and called the 'Avocat Pathelin,' was popular. It was this later perversion which served as the basis of an English farce, entitled the 'Village Lawyer,' and the 'Great Mutton Trial' is simply the 'Village Lawyer' transmogrified to suit the bolder and more robust methods of the negro minstrels.

III

And here we may discover the real reason why negro-minstrelsy failed to establish itself. It neglected its opportunity to devote itself primarily to its own peculiar field—the humorous reproduction of the sayings and doings of the colored man in the United States. To represent the negro in his comic aspects and in his sentimental moods was what the minstrels pretended to do; but the pretense was often only a hollow mockery. Even the musical instruments they affected, the banjo and the bones, were not as characteristic of the field-hand, or even of the town darky, as the violin. Indeed, the bones cannot be considered as in any way special to the negro; they were familiar to Shakspere's Bottom, who declared: "I have a reasonable good ear in music; let us have the tongs and the bones." And the wise recorder of the words and deeds of Uncle Remus asserted that he had never listened to the staccato picking of a banjo in the negro-quarters of any plantation.

"I have seen the negro at work," so Harris once stated, "and I have seen him at play; I have attended his corn-shuckings, his dances, and his frolics; I have heard him give the wonderful melody of his songs to the winds; I have heard him give barbaric airs to the quills" (that is to say, to the Pan-pipes); "I have heard him scrape jubilantly on the fiddle; I have seen him blow wildly on the bugle, and beat enthusiastically on

the triangle; but I have never heard him play on the banjo." Mr. George W. Cable thereupon came forward with his evidence to the effect that, altho the banjo was to be found occasionally on a plantation, it was far less frequently seen than the violin. It will be noted that Harris was speaking of the Georgian negro, and that Mr. Cable was talking about the negro in Louisiana; and perhaps the true habitat of the banjo is to be found farther north and near to the border States. At any rate, there is a footnote to one of Thomas Jefferson's 'Notes on Virginia' (published in 1784), which informs us that the instrument proper to the slaves of the Old Dominion is "the banjar, which they brought hither from Africa, and which is the origin of the guitar, its chords being precisely the four lower chords of the guitar."

Now and again some one negro minstrel did make a serious study of a negro type; such a performer was J. W. McAndrews, the "Watermelon Man." But the most of them were content to be comic without any effort to catch the special comicality of the darky; and sometimes they strayed so completely from the path as to indulge in songs in an alleged Irish brogue or in a dislocated German dialect. Now, nothing could well be conceived more incongruously inartistic than a white man blacked up into the semblance of a negro, and then impertinently caroling an impudent Irish lyric. Yet the general neglect of the opportunities for a more accurate presentation of negro characteristics is to be seen in the strange fact that the minstrels

failed to perceive the possible popularity of rag-time tunes, and failed also to put the cake-walk on the stage. Even at the height of its vogue in the mid years of the nineteenth century, negro-minstrelsy did not occupy its own field, and did not try to raise therein the varied flowers of which they had the seed.

Instead of cultivating the tempting possibilities which lay before them, and devoting themselves to a loving delineation of the colored people who make up a tenth of our population, they turned aside to devote themselves to the spectacular elaboration of their original entertainment. The clog-dances became most intricate and more mechanical—and thereby still more remote from the buck-and-wing dancing of the real negro. The First Part was presented with accompaniments of Oriental magnificence and of variegated glitter. The chorus was enlarged; the musicians were multiplied; the End-men operated in relays; and at last the bass-drum which towered aloft over Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels bore the boastful legend: "40. Count Them. 40." And when the suspicious spectator obeyed this command, he discovered to his surprise that the vaunt was more than made good since he had a full view of at least half a dozen performers in addition to the promised twoscore.

At the apex of his inflated prosperity Haverly invaded Germany with his mastodonic organization; and one result of his visit was probably still further to confuse the Teutonic misinformation about the American type, which seems often to be a curious composite

photograph of the red men of Cooper, the black men of Mrs. Stowe, and the white men of Mark Twain and Bret Harte. And it was reported at the time that another and more immediate result of this rash foray beyond the boundaries of the English-speaking race was that Haverly was, for a while, in danger of arrest by the police for a fraudulent attempt to deceive the German public, because he was pretending to present a company of *negro* minstrels, whereas his performers were actually white men!

It should be recorded that while the vogue lasted, there did come into existence sundry troops of minstrels whose members were all of them actually colored men, altho they conformed to the convention set by those whom they were imitating and conscientiously disguised themselves with burnt cork, to achieve the sable uniformity temporarily attained by the ordinary negro minstrels. Perhaps the most obvious parallel of the blacking up of veritable colored men to follow the example of the white men who pretended to imitate the negro is to be found in the original performance of 'As You Like It,' on the Elizabethan stage, when the shaven boy-actor who impersonated Rosalind disguised himself as a lad, and then had to pretend to Orlando that he was a girl.

IV

For the decline and fall of negro-minstrelsy it is easy to find more than one sufficient explanation. First of all, it may have been due to its failure to devote itself lovingly to the representation of the many peculiarities of the negro himself. Second, it is possible that negro-minstrelsy had an inherent and inevitable disqualification for enduring popularity, in that it was exclusively masculine and necessarily deprived of the potent attractiveness exerted by the members of the more fascinating sex. And in the third place, its program was rather limited and monotonous, and therefore negro-minstrelsy could not long withstand the competition of the music-hall, of the variety-show, and of the comic musical pieces, which satisfied more amply the exactly similar taste of the public for broad fun commingled with song and dance.

Whatever the precise cause may be, there is no denying that negro-minstrelsy is on the verge of extinction, however much we may bewail the fact. It failed to accomplish its true purpose, and it is disappearing, leaving behind it little that is worthy of preservation except a few of its songs. This, at least, it has to its credit—that it gave Stephen Collins Foster the chance to produce his simple melodies. Perhaps we might even venture to assert that the existence of negro-minstrelsy is justified by a single one of these songs—by 'Old Folks at Home,' which has a wailing melan-

choly and an unaffected pathos, lacking in the earlier and more saccharine 'Home, Sweet Home,' which the English composer, Bishop, based on an old Sicilian tune. After Foster came Root and Work, and 'My Old Kentucky Home' was succeeded by 'Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching,' and by 'Marching thru Georgia'—which last lyric now shares its popularity only with 'Dixie' as a musical relic of the Civil War.

It would be pleasant to know whether it was one of Foster's songs, and which one it may have been that once touched the tender heart of Thackeray. "I heard a humorous balladist not long since," the novelist recorded, "a minstrel with wool on his head, and an ultra Ethiopian complexion, who performed a negro ballad that I confess moistened these spectacles in a most unexpected manner. They have gazed at dozens of tragedy-queens dying on the stage and expiring in appropriate blank verse, and I never wanted to wipe them. They have looked up, with deep respect be it said, at many scores of clergymen without being dimmed, and behold! a vagabond with a corked face and a banjo, sings a little song, strikes a wild note, which sets the heart thrilling with happy pity."

(1912.)

XIV

THE UTILITY OF THE VARIETY-SHOW

THE UTILITY OF THE VARIETY-SHOW

I

In an advertisement issued by one of the huge department stores of New York not long ago, the assertion was made that the house had on sale "all the new novelties." A purist in language might be moved to protest that this proclamation was plainly tautological, because it is the essential quality of every novelty to be new. But even a purist in language, if he happens also to be an honest observer of things as they are, would be forced to admit that his supercilious cavil had only a superficial justification, since, as a matter of fact, there are many novelties which are not new, and which, indeed, are venerably ancient. It was Solomon, superabundantly married, and therefore in an excellent position to acquire wisdom, who declared that there is nothing new under the sun. Wireless telegraphy is only a development of the signaling by beacon-fires, which was practised by the Greeks and which they employed to convey immediately to Greece the glad tidings of the fall of Troy; and moving-pictures are only an ingenious amplification of the zoëtrope of our childhood.

The amusement-parks which sprang up all over the United States in the early part of the twentieth cen-

tury, in imitation of those at Coney Island, bear an undeniable resemblance to the Foire Saint Laurent and to the other fairs of Paris in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even the loud-voiced crier who proclaims the merits of the several side-shows, and who is now known as a "barker," bears a name which is only a translation of that given to his forbears two hundred years ago in France—*aboyeur*.

The so-called cabaret-shows, prevalent in the larger cities of the United States in the winter of 1911–1912, were hailed as the very latest form of amusement, combining as they did the solid pleasures of the table with the ethereal delights of song-and-dance; and yet Froissart is a witness that something very like the cabaret-show was known in the Middle Ages, and Gibbon has recorded its existence nearly a thousand years earlier, at the court of Theodoric. Indeed, the Romans, and the Greeks before them, had employed performers of one sort or another to relieve the monotony of their banquets. Gaditanian dancers were popular thruout the wide realm of Rome, almost two thousand years before Carmencita came from Cadiz to warble and caper at midnight in the studios of American painters, just before and just after the guests had enjoyed the refreshments provided by their artistic hosts.

As the cabaret-show is only another form of the well-known "vaudeville supper," it must be relegated to the class of novelties which are not new. And vaudeville itself is only the long familiar variety-show. It

may now be called by a new name, and many of those who do not look behind a label may accept it as a new thing; nevertheless it is very old, indeed. The name "vaudeville" is an absurd misnomer, like so many other terms due to our habit of careless borrowing from other tongues. In French *vaudeville* originally designated a kind of topical song, bristling with pointed gibes at the follies of the moment; and then in time it took on another meaning, when it was used to describe a light and lively farce interspersed with occasional lyrics set to old-fashioned tunes. It is impossible to say just how and why this French word, which had two distinct meanings in its own language, should have been imported into English to characterize improperly a form of amusement which we had long known by the admirably exact name of variety-show. The French themselves call their own type of variety-show, at which refreshments are served, a *café-concert.* Their nickname for it is a *beuglant,* a place where there is "howling"—which seems to imply that they do not expect too much melody from the singers, who appear at these performances. In England an establishment of this kind is called a music-hall; and it was more than half a century ago that Planché described their blatant lyrics set to brazen tunes as "most music-hall, most melancholy."

Whatever its name may be in the different parts of the world, the entertainment is much the same. The most frequent item on the program is the comic song, often accompanied by a rudimentary dance. Some-

times it is in the martial staccato of Paulus's 'En revenant de la révue' which boosted General Boulanger into a furious but fleeting political popularity. Sometimes it is the coonful melody of 'Under the Bamboo Tree' or 'Dinah, the Moon am Shining.' Sometimes it is an almost epileptic lyric, like 'Tarara-boom-de-ay.' Sometimes a singer of a more delicate art, like Yvette Guilbert, ventures upon songs of a more subtly sentimental appeal. There may be a swift succession of solos, male singers and female alternating, those of the most fame appearing latest, as is the practise in the first part of the Parisian open-air *café-chantant,* the Alcazar or the Ambassadeurs. There may be duets or trios or quartets, serious or comic, decorously unadorned or diversified by dancing. There may be songs to be interpreted by half a dozen performers, accompanied by more or less dramatic action, like the 'Mulligan Guards,' which was the simple germ wherefrom sprouted the long series of more and more elaborate Harrigan and Hart plays, delineating with keen insight and with sympathetic humor the manifold aspects of tenement-house life in New York, and possessing a rich flavor of fun curiously akin to that which amuses us in the plays wherein Plautus had sketched the tenement-house life in Rome two thousand years ago.

While the song and the song-and-dance and the song-and-parade may be the staple of the entertainment, the variety-show justifies its name by the medley of other exhibitions it presents. It delights in the

dance unaccompanied by the song; and in some of the English music-halls, the Alhambra and the Empire in London, the ballet is the foremost attraction, providing an opportunity for the display of her dainty art to so exquisite a dancer as Mlle. Genée. In New York it is now a refuge for the waifs and strays of vanishing negro-minstrelsy. It is ready to welcome the wandering conjurer and the strolling juggler. It extends its hospitality to the acrobat, single or in groups, throwing flipflaps on the stage, flying thru the air on a trapeze or diving into the water in a tank. It acts as host to the trainer of performing animals, dogs and cats, seals and elephants. It lends its stage to the puppet-show performer, to the sidewalk conversationalist, and to the ventriloquist, with his pair of stolid figures seemingly seated uncomfortably on his knees and actually supported by his hands, while his adroit fingers manipulate their mechanical mouths.

Of late, the variety-show has accepted the aid of the exhibitors of moving-pictures, just as the exhibitors of moving-pictures have invoked the casual assistance of song-and-dance teams and of other vaudeville performers to relieve the strain on the eyes of their spectators. And the introduction of the cinematograph, or the bioscope, or whatever it may be called, is, perhaps, the only real novelty in our latter-day variety-show. All the other performers are presenting feats of a kind known to our remote ancestors, even if these feats are now more skilfully presented. Animals were put thru their paces hundreds of years ago; and per-

forming dogs and educated bears figure frequently in the illuminations which decorate many a medieval manuscript. There were tight-rope dancers in Alexandria and in Byzantium; there were contortionists in Rome and in Greece, and the flexibility of these latter is preserved for us in the vase-paintings which have been replevined from the ashes of Pompeii and the lava of Herculaneum. Quintillian tells us of the wonderful feats of certain performers on the stage in his day, "with balls, and of other jugglers whose dexterity is such that one might suppose the things which they throw from them to return of their own accord, and to fly wheresoever they are commanded." The art of modern magic has enlarged its boundaries by the aid of the modern sciences of mechanics and physics, but elementary sleights-of-hand were known to a remote antiquity, and savages always had their medicine-men and their marabouts, workers of primitive wonders to strike awe into the souls of their unsophisticated beholders. The variety-show may have the variety it vaunts itself as possessing; but to novelty it can lay little claim.

II

The constituent elements of the variety-show as we know it to-day have existed since a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary—to use the old legal phrase. The appeal of almost every one of these elements and of the variety-show as a whole

is ever to the eye and to the ear, to the senses rather than to the emotions; and to the intellect it appeals even more infrequently. Its primary purpose is to afford a kaleidoscopic succession of contrasted amusements for the benefit of those who are easily satisfied by glitter of spectacle, by incessant movement, and by violent music. It is the ideal entertainment for that redoubtable entity, the Tired Business Man, who checks his brains with his overcoat, and who resents having to witness anything in the theater which might make him think. Not only does the variety-show flourish because it is exactly adjusted to the unintellectual and purely sensational likings of the Tired Business Man and to the similar tastes of his fit mate, who is fatigued because her life is idle and empty, but for his benefit also, and for hers the summer song-show and the alleged "comic opera" and the misnamed "review" have been called into existence. Indeed, it is obvious enough that most of our summer song-shows and many of our "comic operas" and "reviews" are, in reality, only more or less disguised variety-shows.

With facts as they are, there is never any excuse for quarreling. The Tired Business Man is a fact; and it is only fair that what he demands shall be supplied by caterers to the cravings of the populace. But even tho his name is legion, the Tired Business Man is to be accepted only with contemptuous toleration. He is to be endured only so long as he does not insist on imposing his likings upon others who have a more delicate perception, and who are willing to bring their

brains with them when they take their places in the theater. Even in the variety-show which seems often to exist only for the pleasure of those who still linger in what one of George Eliot's wise characters aptly called "a puerile state of culture," nevertheless, we can now and again discover signs of a longing for something less void of purpose than mere spectacle. For example, it was in a variety-show that Mr. Belasco's finely imaginative dramatization of Mr. Long's 'Madame Butterfly' was set before the American public several years prior to its being adorned by the pathetic music of Puccini for the benefit of opera-goers.

In fact, it is well to remember that the *opéra comique* of the French had its humble origin in the theater of the Parisian fairs, where also we can discover the rude beginnings of that crude form of melodrama which Victor Hugo lifted into literature in 'Hernani' and 'Ruy Blas,' casting the cloth-of-gold of his splendid lyricism over the arbitrarily articulated skeleton of his violent action. It was an old negro-minstrel act, representing the rehearsal of an amateur band, that the Hanlon-Lees borrowed to amplify into a rough-and-tumble pantomime for performance in a variety-show in Paris; and this knockabout sketch proved to be the stepping-stone which enabled them soon to achieve the fantastic eccentricity of their 'Voyage en Suisse,' performed in real theaters, first in Paris and then in New York, to the joy of all who could appreciate the perfection of their art as pantomimists. And, once again, it was in a variety-show of the lowest class

that Denman Thompson first appeared as 'Josh Whitcomb Among the Female Bathers,' a vulgar episode of indelicate humor, wherein, however, was contained the germ of that perennially popular play, the 'Old Homestead,' which gave a pure pleasure to countless thousands of theater-goers, season after season, for at least a quarter of a century.

When we look back over the long annals of the variety-show we cannot escape the conclusion that here is its real opportunity, its true function, and its necessary justification. For the most part, it supplies a purely sensational amusement for the unthinking; and yet it is continually serving as a nursery for the actual theater. It is thus seen to be a proving ground for the seeds of widely different dramatic species—*opéra comique* and melodrama in France, the *ballet d'action* in England, the rural play in the United States. It is not always conscious of its possibilities, nor does it always improve them to best advantage. Normally it provides an entertainment appealing mainly to the senses, often empty, and often unsatisfying because of its monotony. But on occasion it is capable of grasping at higher things, and of encouraging artists who will sooner or later outgrow its limitations and transfer their activities to the theaters wherein audiences are more eager for veracity of character portrayal.

III

On one side the variety-show intersects the ring of the circus and the curving line of the First Part of negro-minstrelsy, while on the other it impinges on the sphere of the more literary drama. Its existence is evidence that the show business is always the show business, no matter how manifold and dissimilar its manifestations may seem to be. The men and women who have grown up in the regular theaters are a little inclined to be scornfully jealous of the less highly esteemed performers in the variety-show, even if they themselves are occasionally tempted by the lure of high pay for hard work to condescend to vaudeville engagements. No doubt, the bill of fare set before us more often than not in the variety-show justifies this attitude on the part of the high priests of the more legitimate drama; yet they ought to be broad-minded enough to recognize merit wherever it may be found. The late John Gilbert, best of Sir Peter Teazles, and of Sir Anthony Absolutes, was not a little provoked by the praise bestowed upon Harrigan and Hart and their associates by Mr. Howells and by other critics of the acted drama, who relished the peculiar flavor of 'Squatter Sovereignty' and its companion plays. Gilbert was puzzled to discover any reason why any criticism whould be wasted on pieces which pretended to be little more than variety-show sketches. But Joseph Jefferson, a far more versatile comedian than

John Gilbert, was swift to discern merit, and he was wholly free from toplofty condescension toward other forms of the histrionic art than that in which he was himself pre-eminent—perhaps, because in his youth he had often appeared as a burlesque actor, an experience which he gladly admitted to have been very valuable to him. After Jefferson had gone to see one of the nondescript pieces at Weber and Fields's music-hall, joyous spectacles commingled of song and dance, of eccentric character and of sheer fun, he was loud in his praise of the histrionic art displayed here and there in the course of the performance, declaring without hesitation that one episode, in which the two managers took part, was simply the finest piece of comic acting he had seen that whole winter. Probably the ordinary playgoers, who had flocked to be amused by this loose-jointed piece, took a somewhat apologetic attitude toward the pleasure they had received; and probably they supposed that their pleasure at the entertainment offered to them was due mainly to the pervading bustle and dazzle of the kaleidoscopic show. But Jefferson had a keener insight into the practise of the art he adorned; and he recognized at once the sheer histrionic skill which lent the illusion of life to the fantastic impossibility of the humorous situation.

Jefferson, one may venture to assert, would not have been surprised if he had learned that an American university professor of dramatic literature, whenever he came to discuss the lyrical-burlesques of Aristophanes, was in the habit of sending his whole class to

Weber and Fields that his students might see for themselves the nearest modern analog to the robust fantasies of the great Greek humorist. Aristophanes was a many-sided genius; as a lyric poet of ethereal elevation he must be set by the side of Shelley; as a keen satirist of contemporary fads and foibles he must be compared with Rabelais; and as a fun-maker pure and simple, as a comic playwright, willing and able to evoke unexpected laughter by ludicrous antics, he reveals an undeniable likeness to the adroit devisers of the hodge-podge of humorous episodes represented with contagious humor by Weber and Fields. And the heterogeneous pieces which used to be produced by the two performers who devote themselves to the dislocation of the English language were outgrowths of the variety-show, from which, indeed, the two performers themselves were graduates.

It is this aspect of the variety-show, its supplying of opportunities for artistic development to ambitious performers, and its own spontaneous generation of dramatic forms capable of being lifted into literature—it is this aspect of the variety-show which would be emphasized by any competent writer undertaking to narrate its long and involved history. That no one has yet written a history of the variety-show is as surprising as that no one has yet written a history of negro-minstrelsy. The materials for such a book are accessible and abundant, since there are already richly documented accounts of the fairs of Paris and of London, in which the variety-show flourished centuries

ago. There are accounts of the English concert-halls as they now exist and of the French *café-concerts*. The historian will also be aided by the various treatises on the ballet, and on the circus, and on the puppet-show, with all of which forms of entertainment the variety-show has always had intimate relations.

It may be that the future historian will be moved to point out the superficial likeness between the variety-show and the Sunday issues of certain American newspapers. These Sunday newspapers are really magazines—that is to say, they occupy a position midway between journalism and literature, just as the variety-show occupies a position midway between the circus and the theater. The magazine pages of these Sunday newspapers set before their readers a very variegated bill of fare; they provide photographs of recent events —which are the equivalent of the moving-pictures of the variety-show; they contain short-stories—which are, in narrative, what the brief plays of the variety-show are in dialog and action; they abound in anecdotes and in comic sayings—which are closely akin to the utterances of the sidewalk conversationalists of the variety-show. And the variety-show itself is like journalism, in that it is a modern combination of elements of the remotest antiquity, for altho the actual newspaper is only two or three centuries old, there were always channels by which news was conveyed to the eager public. The men of Athens nearly two thousand years ago were glad to hear and to tell some new thing, and their wants were supplied, even if there was

in classical antiquity and in the Middle Ages no organization faintly anticipating the marvelous machinery for collecting and distributing information possessed by the newspapers of the twentieth century.

(1912.)

XV

THE METHOD OF MODERN MAGIC

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I

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, said Longfellow—altho the remark does not seem especially characteristic of this gentle poet—"is what biography ought to be." And in the long list of alluring autobiographies, from Cellini's and Cibber's, from Franklin's and Goldoni's, there are few more fascinating than the 'Confidences of a Prestidigitator' of Robert-Houdin. A hostile critic of Robert-Houdin's career has recorded the fact—if it is a fact—that Robert-Houdin once confided to a fellow magician that his autobiography had been written for him by a clever Parisian journalist; and it must be admitted that not a few amusing French autobiographies have not been the children of their putative parents—for instance, the memoirs of Vidocq, the detective. Yet this is not as damaging an admission as it may seem at first sight since the clever Parisian journalist may have been little more than the amanuensis of the prestidigitator, hired only to give literary form to the actual recollections of his employer. Such a proceeding would not deprive Robert-Houdin's autobiography by its authenticity. It remains a classic, beloved by all who joy in the delights of conjuring. Unfortunately the hostile critic has gone further in his attack upon

Robert-Houdin's reputation, and he has succeeded in showing that the renowned French conjurer claimed as his own invention not a few illusions which had been already exhibited by his predecessors in the art of deception.

Yet this unjustified boasting does not invalidate Robert-Houdin's title to be considered the father of modern magic. Even if he was treading in the path of those who had gone before, he attained at last to a consistent theory of the art, far in advance of that held by earlier magicians. Many of his marvels, and perhaps more than one of the most striking of them, may have been but improvements upon effects originally contrived by others; yet every succeeding generation can rise only by standing upon the shoulders of the generations that went before, and it is justified in availing itself of all that these earlier generations may have discovered and invented. Robert-Houdin tells us himself that he was greatly indebted to the Comte de Grisy, whose stage-name was Torrini. In fact, Robert-Houdin might be called a pupil of Torrini, as Mr. John S. Sargent is a pupil of Carolus Duran. It was upon Torrini's dignified simplicity as a magician that Robert-Houdin modelled his own unpretending presentation of his feats of magic. Apparently it was a famous conjurer named Frikell, who first discarded the cumbersome and glittering array of apparatus which used to be displayed on the stage to dazzle the eyes of the spectators; but this discarding of obtrusive paraphernalia was not deliberate, being due only

to the accidental destruction of Frikell's stage-furniture by fire, whereby the performer was suddenly forced to rely upon the less complicated experiments, which could be exhibited without extraneous aid. The abandoning of overt apparatus, which Frikell was forced into by misfortune, Robert-Houdin adopted as an abiding principle. He kept his stage as unencumbered as possible, altho, of course, he brought forward from time to time the special objects necessary for the illusions he was about to exhibit.

Not only did he perform on a stage which was intended to resemble a drawing-room, he also eschewed any other costume than that appropriate to a drawing-room. Earlier performers had not hesitated to deck themselves in Oriental apparel or in the flowing garb of a medieval magician. Robert-Houdin was always modern and never medieval; and he adopted this attitude deliberately. He was the first to formulate the fundamental principle of the modern art of magic —that a conjurer should be "an actor playing the part of a magician." One of the foremost exponents of modern magic, Mr. Maskelyne, notes that many conjurers strive only to play the part of some other conjurer; and it might be added that there are not a few who fail entirely to see the necessity for playing a part and who content themselves with a purposeless display of their misplaced dexterity. But the masters of the art are men like Robert Heller and Buatier da Kolta, who were accomplished comedians, each in his own fashion, and who presented a succession of little

plays—for a truly good experiment in magic is really a diminutive drama.

It may be brief and simple—a play in one act; or it may be prolonged and complicated—a play in three or five acts. But like any other play it ought to possess a central idea and to have a definite plot. It should tend straight toward its single conclusion, which must be the logical development of all that has gone before; that is to say, it must possess what the critics of the drama term Unity of Action. It should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, in accord with Aristotle's requirement for a tragedy. It must work up to its culmination with a steadily increasing intensity of interest. It must contain nothing not directly contributory to the startling climax which is its surprising and satisfying conclusion. It must not digress or dally in by-paths, however entertaining these may be in themselves, but push onward to its inevitable finish. It is only by conceiving of every one of his successive experiments as a play, complete in itself and governed by the inexorable laws of the drama, that the magician can rise to the summit of his art. He is a conjurer and a comedian at the same time, making his dexterity the servant of his drama, and never for a single moment allowing this dexterity to force itself upon the attention of the audience. Indeed, the one thing he ought to conceal is his possession of any special gift in manipulation. He should keep his audience ever guessing as to the method of his apparent miracles.

II

It is because Robert-Houdin was seemingly the first conjurer to adopt these principles as his irrefragable code of procedure that he is to be accepted as the father of modern magic. He never allowed himself to parade his skill in manipulating coins and cards at the risk of distracting the attention of the spectators from the central and culminating effect around which he had constructed his plot. No doubt, he possessed dexterity in abundance, but it was subordinate to his dramatic intent. No doubt, again, some of the devices he used had sometimes been employed by a long succession of his predecessors in conjuring. As a matter of course he availed himself of all sorts of mere tricks, of ingenious sleights, and of artful apparatus that the conjurers who went before him had devised for their own use long before he was born. An experiment in magic—to use the term that Mr. Maskelyne prefers, is not a mere trick—or at least it ought not to be. It is not the exhibition of a device or of a sleight or of an adroit mechanical apparatus. Rather is it a coherent whole, direct in its development, no matter how many subtleties of concealment and deception it may employ in the course of its accomplishment.

Most amateurs in the art of magic, and also only too many professional performers, place their reliance mainly upon the trick itself—the deceptive manipulation or the novel apparatus—and are satisfied to get

out of it what they can. They invent new methods of changing a card or of making coins pass into a box, overlooking the fact that these inventions are valueless except as they may be utilized to facilitate the execution of one of those larger feats which only are fairly to be entitled experiments in magic, and which are distinguished always by the direct simplicity and the straightforward unity of their plots. In fact, an experiment in magic must aim at that totality of effect, that perfect subordination of the minor means to the major end, which Poe insisted upon as the dominant characteristic of the true short-story. And this totality of effect can be achieved only by the rigorous exclusion of everything which in any way contradicts that central idea out of which the true short-story must always be developed. Unity and totality, and a rigorous obedience to what Herbert Spencer called the Principle of Economy of Attention—these are the essential elements in the presentation of a worthy experiment in magic.

An intimate friend of the late Alexander Hermann, the last of a long line of Hermanns who have been eminent in the history of the art, has asserted that Alexander Hermann was wont to insist that the conjurer must possess three qualifications for the practise of his profession. The first of these is dexterity; the second is dexterity; and the third is also dexterity. Now, there is a sense in which this assertion is true; but it may be easily misapprehended. A conjurer needs to be dexterous, altho more than one master of

modern magic, notably Robert Heller, has not been pre-eminent in the possession of this qualification. A moderate degree of dexterity is essential, and perhaps more than a moderate degree; but dexterity is not the prime requisite, which is rather the dramatic instinct, or, perhaps, it had better be called the dramaturgic imagination, that can hit on a new idea and build it up into a plot, and thus devise an experiment in magic completely satisfactory to the artistic sense.

What the master of the magic art never forgets is that dexterity is not an end in itself; it is only one of the means by the aid of which the marvel may be wrought. There are, to-day, performers of a surpassing skill in the manipulation of cards and coins, capable of feats which would have been the despair of Robert-Houdin and of Robert Heller; and some of them are so enamored of their own dexterity that in their eagerness for its exhibition they lose sight of unity and totality. As a result of this lapse from the loftier standards of their art they present a disconcerting huddle of sleights of hand until the amazed spectators lose all sense of progression, as these bewildering effects tumble over one another without any attempt at climax. Such a performance is an empty display of difficulty conquered for its own sake; it is only a sequence of "stunts"; it is mere vanity and vexation of spirit. It is like the favorite Scotch dish, the haggis, which is said to supply only "confused feeding."

It is always interesting to note how the principles of the arts have a certain relation, and how we can

constantly discover parallels in two wholly different fields. This abuse of dexterity in the art of modern magic is closely akin to the abuse of toe-dancing in the art of the ballet. As the conjurer ought to have dexterity at his command to serve when it is needed, so the accomplished ballet-dancer ought to be able to walk on her toes, when this feat will fit into the scheme of the special dance she has undertaken to perform. But for a dancer to confine herself to the executing of a series of difficult steps involving nothing more than toe-dancing is to circumscribe the range of her art and to accept as the end what ought to be only the means. Here again, we have a frank substitution of a single "stunt" for the larger liberty accorded by a more intelligent understanding of the true principles of the art. The excessive toe-work of the dancer, like the excessive dexterity of the conjurer, is at bottom only what boys call "showing off"; and in the long run even boys tire of this. To descend to showing off is equivalent to the blunder common in bad architecture, when we cannot help seeing that the artist has gone afield to construct his ornament, instead of concentrating his effort on ornamenting his construction.

So far from permitting himself ever to show off, or to invite attention to his own skill, the master of modern magic is careful always to conceal as far as possible the method by which he accomplishes his wonders. He utilizes at will and in conjunction ingenious apparatus and manual dexterity, without ever calling the attention of the spectators to either. He refrains even

from turning up his sleeves or from passing for special examination any of the objects he is employing, while taking care to let it be seen accidentally that these objects are really above suspicion. Like the playwright constructing a play, the composer of an experiment in magic must ever keep in mind his audience; and he must strive always to foresee the exact impression he is making upon the spectators. Like the playwright, the modern magician must so build up each of his experiments that it seizes the attention of the spectators early, that it arouses their interest, that it holds this interest unrelaxed to the end, and that at last it satisfies while it surprises. This can be achieved only when all the elements of the experiment, the idea itself, the plot, the dexterous devices, and the ingenious apparatus which may be necessary, are all so combined and controlled and harmonized as to leave on the memory of the audience a clear and consistent impression—indeed, an impression so sharp that a majority of those who witnessed the experiment could describe it the next day.

It is the disadvantage of the empty display of dexterity for its own sake that fails to leave this definite deposit in the memory; and the spectators are quite unable to recall the central effect. This is generally because there was, in fact, no central effect for them to seize, the performer having scattered his efforts, as tho he were using a shot-gun instead of hitting the bull's-eye with a single rifle-shot. The master of the art is careful to economize the attention of his audience, to

focus it, so to speak, and to arrange his sequence of effects so adroitly that, however multifarious and even complicated may be the means whereby he is achieving his object, the result is attained so directly and so simply that it can be apprehended by the spectators readily and instantly. The experiment has been exhibited as tho it were the easiest thing in the world, even if it is at the same time perceived to be the most impossible to account for. To arrive at this result the performer must preserve an absolute simplicity of manner; he presents himself as a gentleman amusing himself by amusing other gentlemen, who have come together at his invitation to be amused.

III

A gentleman amusing other gentlemen—that should be the ideal; and this ideal not only forbids any foolish clowning and any trivial buffoonery on the part of the performer, but it prohibits also any attempt on his part to incite the gentlemen he is amusing to laugh at any one of their own number who may have been kind enough to lend a hat or a watch, or to come up on the stage as a volunteer assistant by request. Nothing is cheaper, and nothing is in worse taste, than for the performer to make personal remarks about any member of his audience or to hold any one of the spectators up to ridicule. The conjurer is a comedian playing the part of a modern magician, but he is not a low-comedian, ready to get a laugh at any price and at

the cost of any one else. He may be as pleasant as he can, and even as humorous, but he can preserve his own self-respect only by having due regard to the self-respect of all those who have gathered to enjoy his performance. Readers of Robert-Houdin's memoirs will remember how one of the old-school performers used to advertise that he would Eat a Man Alive, and how he sprinkled flour and pepper and salt all over the hapless creature who volunteered to be devoured, and then proceeded to bite the finger of the disgusted and unfortunate victim. This is "most tolerable and not to be endured."

If a demand were to be made for a list of the books likely to be the most useful to those who desire to master the principles of the art of modern magic, one would have to begin by recommending the preliminary perusal of the autobiography of Robert-Houdin, from which a host of useful hints may be gleaned. The Frenchman tells us, for instance, how he once showed off before Torrini and exhibited his manipulative skill over a pack of cards, making a needless display of dexterity, designed to dazzle the eyes of the spectators; and how Torrini pointed out the futility and the disadvantage of this. Then it would be well to consult the invaluable series of volumes on modern magic by "Professor Hoffman" wherein the various tricks and sleights and apparatus are described and illustrated. These books contain what may be called the raw material of the art, the processes which the magician can employ at will in building up his larger experiments in

magic, each of which should be a complete play in itself. Finally, when the student has found out how tricks can be done, he would do well to turn his attention to 'Our Magic,' by Mr. Maskelyne and his associate, Mr. David Devant. And from this logical treatise he can learn how experiments in magic ought to be composed. It is from this admirable discussion of the basic principles of modern magic that several of the points made in this essay have been borrowed.

Mr. Devant calls attention to the fact that new tricks are common, new manipulative devices, new examples of dexterity, and new applications of science, whereas new plots, new ideas for effective presentation, are rare. He describes a series of experiments of his own, some of which utilize again, but in a novel manner, devices long familiar, while others are new both in idea and in many of the subsidiary methods of execution. One of the most hackneyed and yet one of the most effective illusions in the repertory of the conjurer, is that known as the Rising Cards. The performer brings forward a pack of cards, several of which are drawn by members of the audience and returned to the pack, whereupon at the command of the magician they rise out of the pack, one after the other, in the order in which they were drawn. In the oldest form in which this illusion is described in the books on the art of magic, the pack is placed in a case supported by a rod standing on a base; and the secret of the trick lies in this rod and its base. The rod is really a hollow tube, and the base is really an empty box. The tube is

filled with sand, on the top of which rests a leaden weight, to which is attached a thread so arranged over and under certain cards as to cause the chosen cards to rise when it descends down the tube; and in putting the cards into the case the conjurer releases a valve at the bottom of the tube, so that the sand might escape into the box, whereby the weight is lowered, the thread then doing its allotted work, and the cards ascending into view, no matter how far distant from them the performer may be standing when he achieves his miracle.

It seems likely that the invention of this primitive apparatus may have been due to the fact that some eighteenth-century conjurer happened to observe the sand running out of an hour-glass, and set about to find some means whereby this escape of sand could be utilized in his art. The hollow rod, the escaping sand, and the descending weight have long since been discarded; but the illusion of the Rising Cards survives and is now performed in an unending variety of ways. The pack may be held in the hand of the performer, without the use of any case; or it may be placed in a glass goblet; or it may be tied together with a ribbon and thus suspended from cords that swing to and fro almost over the heads of the spectators, and however they may be isolated, the chosen cards rise obediently when they are bidden. The original effect subsists, even tho the devices differ.

It was left for Mr. Devant to give a new twist to this old illusion. For a full pack of playing-cards he

substituted ten cards two or three times larger than playing-cards, and with the ten numerals printed or painted in bold black. These pasteboards are given for examination, and so is a case into which they fit. After they have been duly inspected they are put into the case which is hung from chains. A clean slate is also shown, and wrapped up and given to a spectator to hold. Then three members of the audience are invited to write each a number composed of three figures, and these three numbers are added by a fourth spectator. The total is found to be written on the slate; and then at the behest of the performer the cards containing the figures of this total rise in proper sequence out of the case. It may be noted that the writing on the slate is also an old and well-worn device, and so is the method of making sure that the total of the three numbers written by different persons shall agree with that already concealed on the slate. Yet these three familiar effects are here united in a refreshingly novel experiment in magic, being now fitted into a new plot. The devices themselves are old enough, but Mr. Devant is entitled to full credit for the new combination.

IV

The fundamental principles which Robert-Houdin accepted and which he seems to have taken over from Torrini, Messrs. Maskelyne and Devant have elucidated in their philosophic disquisition, and yet in one

particular their practise is not yet level with their preaching. Before Robert-Houdin and Frikell, or at least before Torrini, and even after these three artists had set a better example, the majority of conjurers filled the stage with gaudy apparatus and insisted on its blazing with an unnecessary prodigality of lights. One magician in the middle of the nineteenth century came forward on a stage absolutely dark, and suddenly fired a pistol, thereby lighting two hundred candles arranged in pyramids behind him. Another hung his stage with black velvet and adorned it with skulls. Torrini and Robert-Houdin made an approach to the unadorned simplicity of an actual drawing-room, altho Robert-Houdin seems to have permitted himself a long shelf at the back of his stage on which his various automatic figures were assembled awaiting their summons to take part in the program. Even Messrs. Maskelyne and Devant are satisfied with a stage-setting which is frankly only a stage-setting—as stagy, in fact, as the ordinary scenery to be seen in a variety-show.

Now, it may be admitted that a nondescript set of this sort, vaguely Oriental, with arches and curtains, and somewhat suggestive of comic opera, may not be inappropriate when any one of the bolder illusions is to be presented—the Box Trick or the Aerial Suspension, the Mystic Cabinet or the Talking Sphinx. Indeed, a special set of scenery is often actually necessary for the presentation of marvels depending mainly on optics or mechanics. But for the first part of the program, when the performer appears in ordinary evening-

dress, and when he is presenting himself as a gentleman in a drawing-room, amusing other gentlemen, by means of experiments in magic, every one of which may be likened to a little play, why should not the stage-set be that of a drawing-room, or of a bachelor's study, as accurately reproduced as similar rooms are reproduced in the modern comedies of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones and Mr. Augustus Thomas? The set accepted by Messrs. Maskelyne and Devant is devoid of the actuality of a real room; it is fantastically stagy, and therefore it lacks both veracity and dignity.

Sooner or later some modern magician, in advance over his rivals, will take this final step, and the curtain will rise on a stage with a box-set realistically reproducing a handsome room, with all its decorations and hangings and furniture in harmony, Jacobean in style, or Chippendale, as the performer's preference may be. There will be chairs and tables in their proper places; there will be book-cases, and window-boxes of flowers; and perhaps there will be a cellaret, where the performer may procure any goblet or decanter he needs. There will be a broad desk in the center, with its writing-pad and its book-rack, and possibly its heap of magazines and weekly papers. This set thus furnished will look like a room that has really been lived in; it will have a door in each of the side walls, and when the curtain rises the stage will be empty. Then the door-bell will ring, and the servant will enter at one door, and, going across the stage to the other, he will admit his master—the master at last of the truly modern art

of magic. The magician will give his hat and coat to the servant, who will take them out, and who will never appear on the stage again except in response to the master's pressure on the electric button, ordinarily used to summon a servant. And the magician will present his succession of experiments in magic, utilizing only the objects which he may borrow from the spectators, or which would naturally be found in a gentleman's room. The apparent absence of all apparatus, the naturalness of the environment, the easy simplicity and the convincing reality of the background—all these elements will coalesce to heighten the effect of the marvels to be wrought by a comedian playing the part of a magician.

(1912.)

XVI

THE LAMENTABLE TRAGEDY OF PUNCH AND JUDY

THE LAMENTABLE TRAGEDY OF PUNCH AND JUDY

I

When we consider how cosmopolitan is the population of these United States, and how freely we have drawn upon all the races of Europe, it is very curious that the puppet-show does not flourish in our American cities as it flourishes in many of the towns on the other side of the Western Ocean. The shrill squeak of Punch is not infrequent in the streets of London—altho it may not now be heard as often as it was a score of years ago. In Paris in the gardens of the Tuileries and of the Luxembourg, and again in the Champs-Elysées where the children congregate in the afternoon, there are nearly half a dozen enclosures roped off and provided with cane chairs so that spectators, old and young, may be gladdened by the vision of Polichinelle, and by the pranks of Guignol. Yet even in Paris there are not now as many puppet-shows as there were fifty years ago; and in Italy and in Germany the traveler fails to find as frequent exhibitions of this sort as he used to meet with in the years that are gone. Apparently there is everywhere a waning interest in the plays performed by the little troop of personages animated by the thumb and fingers of the

invisible performer. And perhaps the declining vogue of this diminutive drama in old Europe is one reason why it has never achieved a wide popularity in young America.

In France the puppet-show is stationary; it has its fixed habitation and abode; and its lovers can easily discover where to find it when they seek the specific pleasure it alone can provide. In England the spectacle of Punch and Judy is ambulatory; the bloodthirsty hero and the bereaved heroine roam the streets at large, and their arrival in any one avenue of traffic can never be predicted with certainty. In the United States poor Punch has never ventured to show his face in the open street, seeking the suffrages of the casual throng; he is not peripatetic but intermittent, and he makes his appearances only in private houses, and only when he is sent for specially to entertain the children's party. Here in America Punch is still a stranger to the broad public; he has an exotic flavor; he suggests Dickens, somehow; and he must be wholly unknown to countless thousands who would rejoice to make his acquaintance and to laugh at his terrible deeds.

His terrible deeds!—perhaps there is in these words a possible explanation for the failure of Punch to win favor among the descendants of the Puritans, who are always inclined to apply severe moral standards of conduct. Now, if we apply any moral standard at all to the conduct of Mr. Punch, the result is simply appalling, for the customary drama of which he is the sole



Behind the scenes



Punch throws away the child



Punch, Judy, and their child



Punch quiets Judy

hero sets before us a story of triumphant villainy, adequately to be compared only with the dastardly history of Richard III in Shakspere's melodramatic tragedy. Mr. Punch is an accessory before the fact in the death of his infant child, and when his devoted wife very naturally remonstrates with him, he turns upon her with invective and violence—a violence which culminates in assassination. Having once seen red and tasted blood, he finds himself swiftly started upon a career of crime. His total depravity tempts him to a startling succession of hideous murders. He slays an inoffensive negro, a harmless clown, and a worthy policeman. Then he succeeds, by a simple trick, in hanging the hangman himself. By his fatal assaults upon these two officers of justice, the necessary policeman and the useful hangman, Mr. Punch exhibits his contempt for the majesty of the law. He stands forth, without a shred of conscience, as a practical anarchist, rejecting all authority. His hand is against every man and every man's hand is against him. And having violated the laws of this world, he finally discloses his callous contempt for the punishment which ought to await him in the next world; he has a hand-to-hand fight with the devil himself—a deadly struggle from which he emerges victorious. And this is the end, which crowns the work.

When we consider the several episodes of Mr. Punch's abhorrent history, we are reluctantly forced to the conclusion that his story is even less informed with morality than that of Richard III. The crookbacked king

comes to a bad end at last; he meets with the just retribution for his many misdeeds; and he falls before the sword of Richmond. But Mr. Punch comes to a good end, and so far as we may know, he lives happy ever after, like the princes and princesses of the fairy-tales. He may even marry again and have another child, to be made away with in its turn. The more we consider his misdeeds and his misadventures the more shocking they are to our moral sense. Mr. Punch appears as a monster of such hideous mien that to be hated he needs but to be seen. This is how he must appear to every one of us who applies a moral standard to the drama, and who is willing to hold every character in a play to a strict accountability for his words and deeds. If we apply this moral standard to the play of Punch and Judy, then that play must be dismissed as profoundly and hopelessly immoral, carrying ethical infection to all who are so unfortunate as to be spectators at its performance. And more particularly, it is an absolutely unfit piece for the young, whose immature minds need to be guarded against everything which might tend to confuse the delicate distinctions between right and wrong.

But, of course, we do not apply a moral standard to the sayings and doings of Mr. Punch, for the plain and sufficient reason that he is not a human being. He is not a man and a brother, upon whom we may be tempted to pattern ourselves. He is but a six-inch puppet, a thing of shreds and patches, a wooden-headed doll, vitalized for a moment only by the hand



Punch on his steed



Punch teaches Jack Ketch how to hang a man



Punch in prison



Punch kills the Devil

concealed inside his flimsy body with its flaunting colors. He is too fantastic, too impossible, too unreal, too unrelated to any possible world, for us to feel called upon to frown upon his misdeeds or to take them seriously. He is a joke, and we know that he is a joke, and all the children know that he is only a joke. Even the youngest child is never tempted to believe in his existence and to be moved to follow his example or to imitate his dark deeds. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; and the proof of a play is in the effect it produces upon the spectators. We may question whether any one of the millions of performances of the lamentable tragedy of Mr. Punch has suggested to a single father the fatal neglect of his offspring or to a single husband the possibility of wife-murder. And we may doubt whether any child, after witnessing Mr. Punch's murderous combats with the policeman and the devil, has ever felt any lessening of his respect for those two time-honored guardians of law and order.

The plea of confession and avoidance which is here set up for Punch and Judy is much the same as that set up by Charles Lamb for the frolicsome Restoration comedies. Lamb admitted that they were degradingly immoral—if you took them seriously and accepted them as pictures of life. But he insisted that they were not really amenable to this moral standard, since they were plainly impossible in any world known to man. Macaulay had no difficulty in showing that Lamb was judging others by his clever and sophisticated self. To Lamb the creatures of Wycherley and

Congreve might reveal manners and customs which removed them from the sphere of recognizable humanity; but the majority of his fellow-spectators were not so nimble-witted; they saw characters on the stage personated by living performers, and they beheld these characters shamelessly doing shameful things. Because the persons in the play were represented by actual human beings they seemed indisputably human; and their deeds could not be considered as outside morality. Yet the plea made by Lamb for the Restoration comedies has a certain validity when it is put forward in behalf of Mr. Punch. He is not personated by an actual human being; and even the least sophisticated of juvenile spectators does not accept him as a fellow-creature strictly amenable to the human code.

II

Historians of the Greek drama have often commented on the fact that the Athenian actors wore towering masks, and that thereby they were deprived of all facial expression. In our snug modern theaters, with their well-lighted stages, we follow with our eyes the shifting emotions as these chase each other across the faces of the actors; and this is one of our keenest pleasures in the playhouse. In the huge theater of Dionysius at Athens, with its ten or twenty thousand spectators, seated tier on tier, along the curving hillside of the Acropolis, the actor was too far removed from most of the playgoers for any play of feature to be visible;

and critics have commiserated the Attic dramatists on their deprivation of this element of potent appeal. Yet the question arises whether the Greek playwrights were really the losers by this immobility of the actors' faces; and we may be allowed to doubt that they were when we recall the fact that the faces of Mr. Punch and of Mrs. Judy, of the policeman and of the hangman, are also fixed once for all. The expression that Mr. Punch wears when he is fondling the baby is, perforce, the same which illuminates his face when he is engaged in joyful combat with the devil, a foeman worthy of his stick. Here the imagination of the spectator comes to the rescue. The wooden head of Mr. Punch is unchanging, no doubt; but those who gaze entranced upon his marvelous doings never miss the play of feature which they would expect if they were part of the audience in a playhouse for grown-ups. Quite possibly the Athenian spectators did not mind the immobility of the masks their actors wore; indeed, that very immobility may have been an incentive to their imaginations. When the Greeks went to their open-air theater, as when we gather around the tent-like theater of Mr. Punch, they knew in advance, as we also know, that the faces of the performers would be unchanging; therefore they did not expect any variety of expression; and probably they got along as well without it as we do at a puppet-show.

There is another likeness between Attic tragedy and Punch and Judy; there is a limitation in the number of characters we are allowed to see at the same time.

As the hidden performer who operates all the figures has only two hands, he can bring before us at any one moment only Mr. Punch and one other of the several characters. The fingers of the right hand animate Mr. Punch, and the fingers of the left hand animate in turn Mrs. Judy and the negro and the clown. At Athens (for reasons which need not here be discussed) the dramatist had the use of only three actors, even tho these might each of them "double" and appear as two or more of the successive characters of the play. So it was that there were never more than three persons taking part in any given episode of an Attic tragedy as there are never more than two persons taking part in any given episode of Punch and Judy. In the thumb-and-finger plays devised in Paris by M. Lemercier de Neuville, he felt so severely the inconvenience of his limitation to two characters that he devised a kind of spiral-spring arrangement inside the costumes of his little figures to hold up their heads; and he prepared invisible supports jutting out just below the flat ledge which forms the base of the proscenium. Thus he was enabled to leave the figure in sight, while he withdrew his hand to animate another character. His *Pupazzi*, as he called them, were clever caricatures of contemporary celebrities; and he was ingenious enough sometimes to maneuver half a dozen of them at once with his single pair of hands, four adjusted into the projecting rests, and two on his fingers.

In the sumptuous puppet-show in the gardens of the

Tuileries the same result is achieved by the employment of two or three manipulators, so that four or even six figures may appear at once. This has greatly enlarged the scope of the performance; and the manager of this theater has very ambitious aims. He likes to rearrange for his juvenile audience the most appropriate of the pieces which have won favor in the real theaters, and to present these with all sorts of spectacular adornments. He has even ventured to give plays as elaborate as 'Around the World in Eighty Days.' But it may be doubted whether this vaulting ambition has not overleaped itself, and whether a puppet-show does not gain rather than lose by restricting its efforts within narrower limits. After all, nothing so delights us at a puppet-show as the feats which are most characteristic and least difficult of accomplishment. We joy to behold one tiny figure belaboring another with his solid club or to follow the vicissitudes of a bout at single-stick, when both combatants thwack lustily at each other's wooden heads.

III

Yet this mention of M. Lemercier de Neuville's *Pupazzi*, with their varied repertory of Aristophanic commentaries on current events, and this memory of the spectacular efforts exhibited in the gardens of the Tuileries, suggest a possible explanation for the fact that Punch and Judy have failed to find wide-spread favor here in America and that they seem to be losing

their pristine popularity in England. There is a pitiable monotony of program in all English-speaking puppet-shows. They confine their repertory to the single play which sets forth the deeds and misdeeds of Mr. Punch. Now, in the Continent of Europe there is no such monotony. Not only in the gardens of the Tuileries but in the Champs-Elysées a young spectator can sit thru performance after performance without fear of having to witness the same piece. Punch appears in only one drama, whereas his French rival, Guignol, in his time plays many parts, with a host of other characters to be his associates, some in one piece and some in another. And the several plays are adorned with a variety of scenery. Of course, there cannot be a very wide range of subject; and always is the stick a prominent feature in the miniature drama. There are a certain number of traditional Guignol pieces, handed down from generation to generation. Some of these have been printed for the use of devoted students of the drama, and some are to be had in little pamphlets for the benefit of the happy French children who may have had a puppet theater with its dozen or more figures presented to them as a New Year's gift. There is in the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University the manuscript of half a dozen of these little plays, written out (in all the license of his own simplified spelling) by the incomparable performer who was in charge of the leading Guignol in the Champs-Elysées in 1867.

It is rather curious that the English puppet-show

should have confined itself for now nearly a hundred years to the unique Punch and Judy, when the puppet-shows of other countries have a changing repertory. It was a puppet performance of a German perversion of Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' which first introduced Goethe to the Faust legend. George Sand, unlike the great German poet in most ways, was yet like him in her delight in the puppet-show. In her country place at Nohant, she had a tiny theater of her own for which she dressed all the puppets, while her son Maurice carved the heads, painted the scenery, devised the plays, and improvised the dialog. Maurice Sand it was, sometimes alone, but occasionally with the aid of a friend, who manipulated the little figures and bestowed upon them a momentary vitality. His mother persuaded him to write out a dozen of the more successful of his little plays for puppets and to publish them; and this volume, the 'Théâtre des Marionnettes à Nohant,' appeared in 1876. George Sand herself wrote a delightful account of the humble beginnings of this famous puppet-show, and described how there came in time to be all sorts of ingenious improvements for achieving spectacular effects.

She declared that the puppet-show is not what it is vainly thought, because it demands an art of a special kind, not only in the construction of the little figures themselves, but more especially in the story which these little figures are to interpret. She held that the particular field of the puppet playwright-performer was to be found in the dramatization of

protracted fantastic romances, abounding in comic characters and in comic episodes and gratifying the fundamental human liking for long-drawn tales of adventure and for fantastic fairy-stories. She found in her son's acted narratives a rest from reality, a release from the oppression of every-day life, an excursion into a realm of fancy and of legend—even if the legend was itself a fanciful invention of the improvising performer. And she declared that she liked the puppet playhouse in her own home, because it was a domestic and fireside pleasure, which could be enjoyed without the exertion imposed by a visit to a real theater. Obviously she found as much delight in being a spectator—after having been a costumer—as her son did in being the author and operator of the spectacle.

IV

There is one note to be made upon George Sand's account of the slow development of the puppet-show at Nohant, beginning as early as 1847. If you will look at any set of Punch and Judy figures hung up to-day in the toy store to tempt the eye of Young America, you will discover alongside Mr. Punch and Mrs. Judy, Jack Ketch and the Devil, a strange green figure with huge jaws and double rows of white teeth. This verdant beast has a body like all other Punch and Judy figures, a loose cloth funnel to slip over the sleeve of the operator; but its head suggests the head of an

alligator, or of a crocodile, or of a dragon. Now, if you will turn to the classic text of the English play of Punch and Judy, edited with a learned introduction and an abundance of scholarly annotation by John Payne Collier—at least, so it is believed, altho the rare little book is anonymous—you will find no mention of any strange beast of this sort. Collier's text of the play is adorned by two dozen illustrations, etched by George Cruikshank, and in no one of these plates will you discover any crocodile, or alligator, or dragon. You will find Toby, the dog, who still survives in most of the few shows to be seen to-day in the streets of London; and you will find Hector, the gallant steed that Mr. Punch mounts with difficulty—and it is sad to have to record that Hector is no longer in the service of Mr. Punch. In fact, one devoted admirer of puppet-shows, whose memory goes back nearly fifty years, is ready to declare that he has never laid eyes on Hector—except in Cruikshank's illustrations. But Mr. Punch, deprived of the privilege of bestriding Hector, now enjoys the fiercer delight of overcoming the green-eyed alligator.

Here we have a question of profound historic interest. Whence came the strange beast with the wide jaws? And here is where George Sand's pleasant paper is a very present help in time of need. She tells us that her son besought her to make a green monster for one of the earliest pieces he devised for her puppet-figures. She did as she was bid, and she sacrificed a pair of blue velvet slippers to provide the marvelous

creature with his gently smiling jaws. She draws attention to the fact that the slippers were blue, and to the further fact that nevertheless the strange beast was always called the Green Monster. And herê may be the explanation of the historic mystery. The fame of the puppets of Nohant was borne abroad; they were talked about all thru France; and they were discussed again and again in the Parisian newspapers. What more likely than that one of the professional puppet players should have seen the infinite possibilities of the Green Monster, and should have perceived its novel fascination for children? Thereupon he borrowed it for his own performances. Certainly it is that the Green Monster is a character in at least one of the manuscript plays preserved in the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, and written out half a century ago. Probably the Green Monster strayed from the puppet-show of the Champs-Elysées sooner or later to one of the toy stores of Paris at the request of some boy who desired it for his own. When the Green Monster had elected domicile in the stores of Paris, he was soon appropriated by the toy-makers of Germany for export to Great Britain and the United States.

(1912.)

XVII

THE PUPPET-PLAY, PAST AND PRESENT

THE PUPPET-PLAY, PAST AND PRESENT

I

In her charming and instructive account of the ingenious puppet-shows with which her son Maurice used to amuse himself and her guests at Nohant half a century ago, George Sand records the fact that the erudite scholar, Magnan, who wrote a learned history of the puppet-show from the remotest antiquity, did not discriminate sharply between the two entirely different kinds of little figures, both of which are carelessly called puppets in English, and marionettes in French. One class comprises these empty and flexible figures which are animated by the thumb and two fingers of the performer who exhibits them by holding his hands above his head, as in the 'Punch and Judy' show. The other contains the larger dolls, suspended on wires (which are supposed to be invisible) and manipulated by one or more performers overhead, who give life to these figures by jerking the various strings as the action of the play may require. These last are the true marionettes; and for the first we have, unfortunately, no distinctive name. It is greatly to be regretted that the two very different types of puppets are not set apart from each other satisfactorily by the contributor of the article on marionettes in the latest edition of the 'Encyclopedia Britannica.'

Each of these two sorts of puppets has an interest of its own; and each of them has its special and peculiar relation to the drama. Both of them have a long and honorable history, and can be traced back in the scanty records of a remote antiquity; altho it seems more likely that the true marionette—the little figure moved by wires from overhead—is the older of the two, antedating by many centuries the Punch and Judy figure, which owes its abrupt and awkward movements to the human thumb and fingers. Both classes are to be found to-day all over the world, not only in the cities of civilization, but in unsuspected nooks and corners on all the shores of all the seven seas. In Turkey, for example, under the name of Karaguez, there is a Punch and Judy of enormous popularity and of doubtful decency, while in Siam there are marionettes which perform religious plays of traditional appeal. Apparently the puppet-show of one type or the other satisfies in its fashion that dramatic instinct which every people possesses in greater or less intensity.

Both kinds of puppet-show flourish in France, and have there been lifted to a more elevated plane of art; and both kinds retain their popularity in Italy, altho in an humbler form. The French are inveterate artists; and they are like the Greeks in desiring to do all things decently and in order. The Italians have, perhaps, a stronger native gift for the drama and they are ready to enjoy a simpler and more primitive puppet-play. It is from Italy that we who speak English have derived our Punch and Judy. Mr. Punch is a



Roman puppets



Griechische Marionette.



Römische Marionette.
Komischer Acteur
Collection Campana.

Greek and Roman puppets



Puppet of Java

direct descendant of that favorite figure of robust Neapolitan farce, Pulcinella; and so is the French Polichinelle. And in Italy to-day the true marionettes have an even broader popularity than the Punch and Judy figures. The Italians who have lately flocked to America in their thousands, until New York now contains more of them than Venice, have imported in the original package the legendary puppet-show setting forth the romantic stories of the Middle Ages and of the early Renascence. We look upon Mr. Punch as comic; but the Italians take their pleasure seriously and the marionettes in their puppet-shows to be seen in New York are truly heroic, and not infrequently highly tragic.

In the interesting discussion of 'Medieval Story,' in which Professor W. W. Lawrence of Columbia University has traced the influence of various ideals of the Middle Ages upon our modern social organization, he has a striking description of the marionette performances which the exiles of Italy have brought with them to America. "Any one who walks thru the Italian quarter of New York City in the evening may notice over a doorway an illuminated sign, 'Theater of Marionettes.' If his curiosity tempts him inside, into the low room crowded with enthusiastic spectators, he will see, on a rude stage, a group of puppets almost as large as life, representing knights and ladies, acting out a little drama in response to the jerking of strings fastened to their arms, and of iron rods firmly fixed in their heads. The warriors are gorgeously attired in

shining armor and plumed helmets; and the ladies have wonderful costumes of bright colors, with a great deal of embroidery and decoration. An Italian in shirt-sleeves in the wings at the side of the stage speaks their lines for them, with all the elocutionary flourishes which he can command. Fiercely immobile as to expression, but most active as to arms and legs, these manikins march about, soliloquize, make love, and debate in council. But it is their battles which arouse the greatest enthusiasm among the audience; and, indeed, these are fought in a way that is a joy to see. Then it is that heroic deeds are done—tin swords resound upon tin armor, helmets are battered about and knocked off, dust rises from the field, the valiant dead fall in staring heaps. At such moments the spectators can hardly restrain themselves from emotion, yet the story is well known to them—perhaps some one sitting near by will volunteer to explain it, asserting that he has known it ever since he was a boy and that he has read it all in a book which he has at home, called 'Reali di Franci.' It is a version of the old tale of Charlemagne and his knights, which, after traveling far from its native home in France, was taken up by the Italian people many centuries ago, and made so much their own that few heroes have been closer to their hearts than Roland, or as they call him, Orlando. Even in their homes in the New World they still celebrate him, so that the very newsboys in the streets of modern America are keeping alive the heroic traditions of the age of Charlemagne."



A Sicilian marionette show

From "By Italian Seas," by Ernest C. Peixotto

II

When we compare the account which Professor Lawrence has here given of the Italian puppet-shows in New York with the description of these same performances in their native land half a century ago, which we find in the 'Roba di Roma' of W. W. Story, the American sculptor-poet, we perceive that there has been little modification of method in the past threescore years. Story studied all sides of the Roman populace, and he maintained that nothing was more characteristically Italian than the marionette theater. He tells us that the love for the acting of *burattini* [or puppets] is universal among the lower classes thruout Italy, and in some cities, especially in Genoa, no pains are spared "in their costume, construction, and movement to render them lifelike. They are made of wood, generally from two to three feet in height, with very large heads, and supernatural glaring eyes that never wink, and are clad in all the splendor of tinsel, velvet, and steel. Their joints are so flexible that the least weight or strain upon them effects a dislocation, and they are moved by wires attached to their heads and extremities. The largest are only about half the height of a man, yet as the stage and all the appointments and scenery are upon the same scale of proportion, the eye is soon deceived, and accepts them as of life-size. But if by accident a hand or arm of one of the wire-pullers appears from behind the scenes or descends below the

hangings, it startles you by its portentous size; and the audience in the stage-boxes instead of reducing the *burattini* to Lilliputians by contrast, as they lean forward, become themselves Brobdingnagians, with elephantine hands and heads."

Story insisted that there is nothing ludicrous to an Italian audience in the performances of these diminutive men and women. On the contrary, nothing is more serious both to the spectators and to the unforeseen operators. In fact, he declared, no human being could be so serious as these tiny performers. "Their countenances are as solemn as death, and more unchanging than the face of a clock. Their terrible gravity when, with drooping heads and collapsed arms, they fix on you their great goggle-eyes is at times ghastly. The plays they perform are mostly heroic, romantic, and historical. They stoop to nothing which is not startling in incident, imposing in style, and grandiose in movement. And the Italian audience listens with a grave and profound interest, as tho the performers were not mere puppets, but actually the heroes they are supposed to be. The inflated and extravagant discourse of the characters is accepted at its face value; to the spectators it is grand and noble. And the foreign visitor must control any desire he may feel to smile at the extraordinary spectacle he is witnessing, and at the marvelous rodomontade he is hearing. To laugh out loud at one of these heroic puppet-plays would be as indecorous as to indulge in laughter during a church service."



A Belgian puppet



A Chinese puppet theater



Puppet figure representing the younger Coquelin

Incidental to the heroic dramas which the puppets play are interludes of ballet-dancing like those which are intercalated, more or less adroitly, into the grand opera performed by full-grown men and women. The Italians are born pantomimists, and they are accomplished dancers. Therefore, there is no reason for surprise that human pantomime and human dancing are imitated in the marionette theaters. There is reason for surprise, however, that Story did not perceive clearly the advantages possessed by the dancing puppets over the dancers of more solid flesh and blood. He found something comic in the pantomime of the puppets, "whose every motion is effected by wires, who imitate the gestures of despair with hands that cannot shut, and, with a wooden gravity of countenance, throw their bodies into terrible contortions to make up for the lack of expression in the face." In mere pantomime it is probable that the puppets would labor under a serious disability, for if a performer cannot use his voice, he needs facial expression to assist the gestures by which only can he then convey his meaning to the other performers and to the spectators. Perhaps it is not too much to assert that the puppet-show is not the proper place for pantomime.

III

We need not wonder that Story admitted their dancing to be superior to their pantomime. Yet he failed to appreciate the true cause of this superiority, and he

was inclined to comment upon the dancing of the *burattini* in a somewhat satiric fashion. He tells us how the principal dancer suddenly appears, "knocks her wooden knees together, and jerking her head about, salutes the audience with a smile quite as artificial as we could see in the best trained of her fleshly rivals." But this artificial smile must have been fixed and permanent on the features of this diminutive dancer—or else the Roman-American essayist merely imagined its presence. "Then, with a masterly ease, after describing air-cirlces with her toes far higher than her head and poising herself in impossible positions, she bounds or rather flies forward with superhuman lightness, performs feats of choreography to awaken envy in Cerito and drive Elssler to despair, and, poising on her pointed toe that disdains to touch the floor, turns never-ending pirouettes on nothing at all, till at last, throwing both her wooden hands forward, she suddenly comes to a swift stop to receive your applause."

This description is unsympathetic, and it induces the surmise that the operator of the *burattini* at the performance described was not a master of his art and did not know how to profit by the possibilities of that art. Yet one of Story's phrases serves to explain why the suspended puppet is superbly qualified to excel in ballet-dancing; that phrase is the one which credits the dancing doll with "supernatural lightness." A skilful operator of the wires which bestow life and movement and grace, is able to imitate easily and ex-



Puppets in Burma



The puppet play of Master Peter (Italian)

quisitely the most difficult feats of the human dancer. If he is sufficiently adroit he robs his suspended figure of all awkwardness, and he dowers her with a floating ethereality surpassing that attainable by any living performer. Now, this floating ethereality is precisely the quality which gives us most pleasure when we are spectators at the performance of a really fine ballet. It is the supreme art of the great dancer to soar lightly aloft, seeming to spurn the stage and to abide in the air. Only very rarely is this illusion possible to the merely human dancer; and when achieved it is but fleeting. Yet this illusion is absolutely within the control of the manipulator of the puppet-dancers. He can make them execute feats of levitation, achievable only by the most marvelously gifted and by the most arduously trained of human dancers.

Of course, the skilful performer must carefully avoid swinging his tiny figures aimlessly thru the air. He must limit the feats that he permits them to accomplish to those which can be actually accomplished by human beings, altho he can do easily what the human beings can achieve only with more or less obvious effort, and he can impart a volatile elasticity a little beyond the power of any human being however favored by Terpsichore. When 'Salome' was, for a season, the sensation of the hour, it was produced by Holden's marionettes; and it afforded a delightful spectacle long to be remembered by all who had the felicity of beholding it. Whatever of vulgarity or of grossness there might be in the play itself, or in the

Dance of the Seven Veils, was purged away by the single fact that all the performers were puppets. So dexterous was the manipulation of the unseen operator who controlled the wires and strings which gave life to the seductive Salome as she circled around the stage in most bewitching fashion, and so precise and accurate was the imitation of a human dancer, that the receptive spectator could not but feel that here at last the play of doubtful propriety had found its only fit stage and its only proper performer. The memory of that exhibition is a perennial pleasure to all who possess it. A thing of beauty it was; and it abides in remembrance as a joy forever. It revealed the art of the puppet-show at its summit. And the art itself was eternally justified by that one performance of the highest technical skill and of the utmost delicacy of taste.

If the most marvelous exploits of terpsichorean art, almost inexecutable by the human toes and the human legs of living dancers, are capable of reproduction by puppets skilfully manipulated by the puller of the wires and strings whereby the little figures are suspended, so also are the dexterous feats of the juggler. One of the specialties of the sole surviving puppet-show of this sort in the Champs-Elysées is the performance of a juggler who tosses aloft and catches in turn a number of glittering balls. The delicate balancing of the tight-rope walker, with her frequent pirouettes on her toes, and with her surprising somersets, is also one of the exhibitions in which the puppet

can defy the rivalry of any living executant, however skilful in the art. At the circus we feel that the tight-rope dancer might fall, whereas at the puppet-show we know with certainty that any fatal mishap is impossible. In Holden's marionette program the miniature mimicry of humanity was carried to the utmost edge of the possible; and no item on his bill of fare was more delectable than the series of scenes in which the traditional Clown and Pantaloon played tricks on the traditional Policeman, and in which they joined forces in belaboring an inoffensive donkey. As the unfortunate quadruped was also a puppet, there was no painful strain on our sympathy.

IV

If a performance by puppets deprived 'Salome' of its vulgar grossness by removing it outside the arena of humanity, so to speak, and by relegating it to an unreal world beyond the strict diocese of the conscience, so a performance by puppets of a passion-play or of any other drama in which the Deity has perforce to appear as a character, is thereby relieved of any tincture of irreverence. We no longer see a divine being interpreted by a human being. We cannot help feeling that all the persons in the play, whether they dwell in heaven or on earth, are equally remote from our common humanity. And therefore we need not be surprised when we discover that the marionette has long been allowed to appear in religious drama. In-

deed, it appears probable that the very name *marionette* is directly derived from the name of the Virgin.

Very early in the history of the Christian Church were the puppets permitted to perform passion-plays and little dramas derived from the stories contained both in the New and the Old Testaments. In England under Elizabeth and James religious puppet-shows of this kind went wandering about the kingdom, taking into the smallest villages an entertainment which would afford to the rural inhabitants the same kind of pleasant instruction which the dwellers in the larger towns had in the more elaborate and long-drawn mysteries performed by the trade-guilds on the Corpus Christi day. That masterly rogue Autolycus in the 'Winter's Tale' tells us that in his time he had been on the road with "a motion of the Prodigal Son"—and a *motion* was the Elizabethan term for a marionette-exhibition. In like manner one of the characters in Ben Jonson's 'Every Man out of His Humor' speaks of "a new motion of the city of Nineveh, with Jonas and the whale." Of course, the puppet performers, like the grown-up actors, did not long confine themselves to sacred themes; they ventured also into contemporary history. A puppet showman who appears in Ben Jonson's 'Bartholomew Fair' tells us that a certain motion setting forth the mysterious Gunpowder Plot, was "a get-penny."

Story described one puppet-play which he saw in a little village on the main road from Rome to Naples, and which had for its central figure Judas Iscariot. But here again his attitude is unsympathetic, perhaps



A Neapolitan Punchinella

From "By Italian Seas," by Ernest C. Peixotto

because the performance was clumsy. "The kiss of Judas, when, after sliding along the stage, he suddenly turned with a sidelong jerk and rapped the other wooden puppet's head with his own, as well as the subsequent scene in which he goes out and hangs himself, beggar description." Yet the expatriated American spectator honestly recorded that the Italian spectators "looked and listened with great gravity, seemed to be highly edified, and certainly showed no signs of seeing anything ludicrous in the performance." We may venture the suggestion that even the sophisticated sculptor-poet himself would have seen nothing ludicrous in this performance if the operator of Judas had been as skilful as the operator of Salome in Holden's marionettes.

A few years ago in Paris one of the younger poets wrote a passion-play which was performed during Lent by a company of dolls, designed and dressed in fit and appropriate costumes by an artist friend familiar with the manners and customs of the Holy Land. While the wires were managed by expert hands, the words of the dialog were spoken by the poet himself, and by two or three other poets who came to his aid. This must have been a seemly spectacle, and it won careful consideration from more than one of the most eminent dramatic critics of France. Here we may find a useful suggestion for those who wish to see certain plays by modern dramatic poets, in which the Deity is a necessary character—Rostand's 'Samaritaine,' for one, and Hauptmann's 'Hannele,' for another. Many of

the devout have a natural repugnance to any performance on the stage (with its materialistic environment and its often sordid conditions) which calls for the impersonation of a divine being by an actor of ordinary flesh and blood. Yet if these same plays were reverently performed by marionettes the aroma of irreverence would be removed. It might even be possible to reproduce in the puppet-show not a little of the solemn religious effect which is felt by all visitors to the passion-play at Oberammergau.

(1912.)

XVIII

SHADOW-PANTOMIME WITH ALL THE MODERN IMPROVEMENTS

SHADOW-PANTOMIME WITH ALL THE MODERN IMPROVEMENTS

I

An American, improving on a suggestion of a Frenchman, has declared that "language was given to man to conceal his thoughts—and to woman to express her emotions." Unfortunately, language is so often inexact that even when it is sufficient to express emotion, it is not precise enough even to conceal thought. Sometimes a term is wholly devoid of truth, as when we call a certain solid a "lead-pencil," which contains no lead, and when we label a certain liquid "soda-water," which contains no soda. Sometimes the term is so vague that it may mean all things to all men. Who, for example, would be bold enough to insist on his own definition of "romanticism"? Sometimes again the term covers two or three things which demand a sharper differentiation. This is the case with the compound word "shadow-pantomime." It is the only name for three distinct things.

First, there is the representation by the dark profile of the human hand upon a wall or a screen, of human heads, and of animal figures, either by an adroit arrangement of the fingers alone, or by the aid of adjusted shapes of cardboard, so as to suggest a hat on

the head and a pipe in the mouth and other needed accessories; this primitive entertainment is sometimes styled "shadowgraphy."

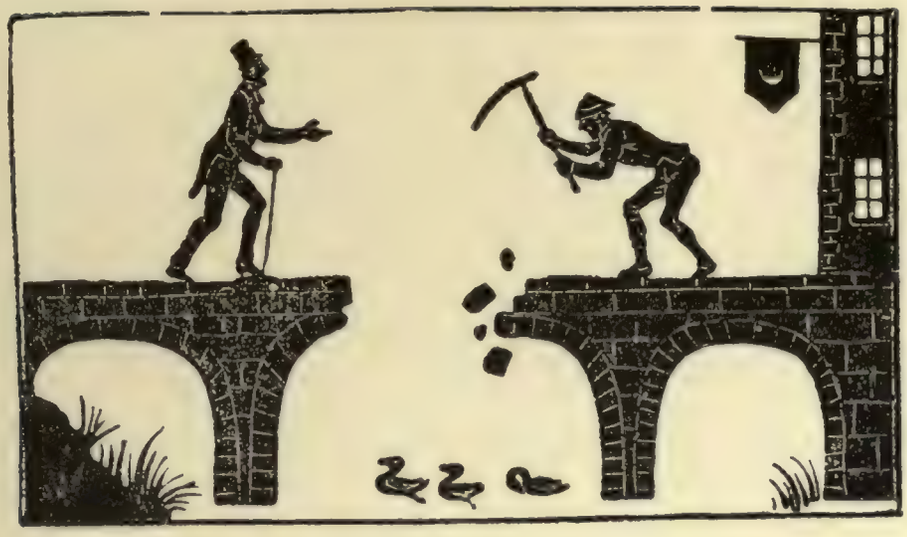
Second, there is the full-sized silhouette of a human figure, due to the shadow cast by the body standing before a lamp, and magnified or diminished as it approaches or recedes the spectators. This is the familiar parlor amusement which Sir James Barrie cleverly utilized with dramatic effect in the final act of his 'Professor's Love-Story,' when one of the characters, standing outside a house, sees the black profiles of other characters projected clearly on the drawn shade of the window before which he is placed.

Then, thirdly, there is the true shadow-pantomime, called by the French "Chinese shadows," *ombres chinoises*, in which the tiny figures, made either of flat cardboard or of metal, are exhibited behind a translucent screen and before a strong light. This is by far the most interesting and the most important of the three widely different kinds of semi-dramatic entertainment, often carelessly confounded together even in the special treatises devoted to this humble art. In France these Chinese shadows have been popular for more than a hundred years, since it was in the eighteenth century that the performer who took the name of Séraphin established his little theater and won the favor of the younger members of the royal family by his presentation of the alluring spectacle, the rudimentary little piece, still popular with children, and still known by its original title, the 'Broken Bridge.'

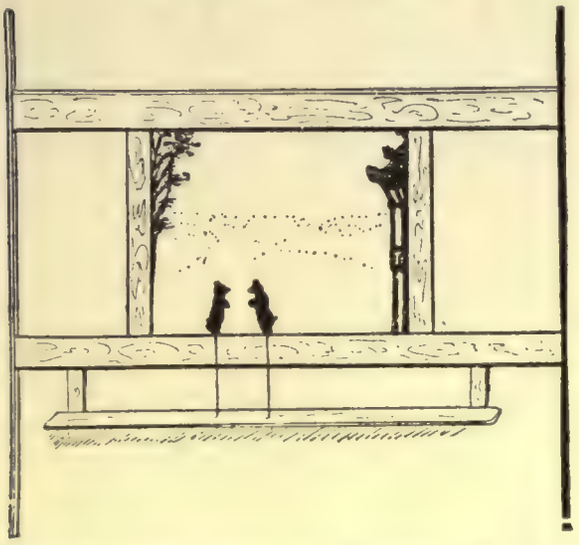
It may not be fanciful to infer that the immediate suggestion for this spectacle was derived from the contemporary vogue of the silhouette itself, this portrait in solid black taking its name from the Frenchman who was minister of finance in 1759. At all events, it was in 1770 that Séraphin began to amuse the children of Paris; and it was more than a century thereafter that M. Lemercier de Neuville elaborated his ingeniously articulated *Pupazzi noirs*. It was a little later still that Caran d'Ache delighted the more sophisticated children of a larger growth, who were wont to assemble at the Chat Noir, with the striking series of military silhouettes resuscitating the mighty Napoleonic epic. And it was at the Chat Noir again that Rivière revealed the further possibilities latent in shadow-pantomime, and to be developed by the aid of colored backgrounds supplied by a magic lantern. Restricted as the sphere of the shadow-pantomime necessarily is, the native artistic impulse of the French has been rarely better disclosed than by their surprising elaboration of a form of amusement, seemingly fitted only to charm the infant mind, into an entertainment satisfactory to the richly developed esthetic sense of mature Parisian playgoers. Just as the rustic revels of remote villagers contained the germ out of which the Greeks were able to develop their austere and elevating tragedy, and just as the modern drama was evolved in the course of centuries out of the medieval mysteries, one source of which we may discover in the infant Christ in the cradle still displayed at Christmastide in Chris-

tian churches thruout the world, so the simple Chinese shadows of Séraphin supplied the root on which Parisian artists were able to graft their ingenious improvements.

The little spectacle proffered originally by Séraphin was frankly infantile in its appeal, and the 'Broken Bridge' is as plainly adjusted to the simple likings of the child as is the lamentable tragedy of Punch and Judy or the puppet-show in which Polichinelle exhibits his hump and his terpsichorean agility. The two arms of the broken bridge arch over a little stream but fail to meet in the center. A flock of ducks crosses leisurely from one bank to the other. A laborer appears on the left-hand fragment of the bridge and begins to swing his pick to loosen stones at the end, and these fragments are then seen to fall into the water. The figure of the workman is articulated, or at least one arm is on a separate piece and moves on a pivot so that a hidden string can raise the pick and let it fall. The laborer sings at his work; and in France he indulges in the traditional lyric about the Bridge of Avignon, where everybody dances in a circle. Then a traveler appears on the right-hand end of the bridge. He hails the laborer, who is hard of hearing at first, but who finally asks him what he wants. The traveler explains that he wishes to cross and asks how he can do this. The laborer keeps on picking away, and sings that "the ducks and the geese they all swim over." The irritated traveler then asks how far it is across, and the laborer again sings, this time to the effect that "when you're in the middle you're half-way over." Then



The broken bridge



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Plan showing the construction of a shadow-picture theater



A Hungarian dancer. This explains the mechanism of the shadow picture opposite



A Hungarian dancer

From a shadow picture by Lemercier de Neuville

the traveler inquires how deep the stream may be, and he gets the exasperating response in song, that if he will only throw in a stone, he'll soon find the bottom. This dialog bears an obvious resemblance to that traditionally associated with the tune of the 'Arkansaw Traveler.'

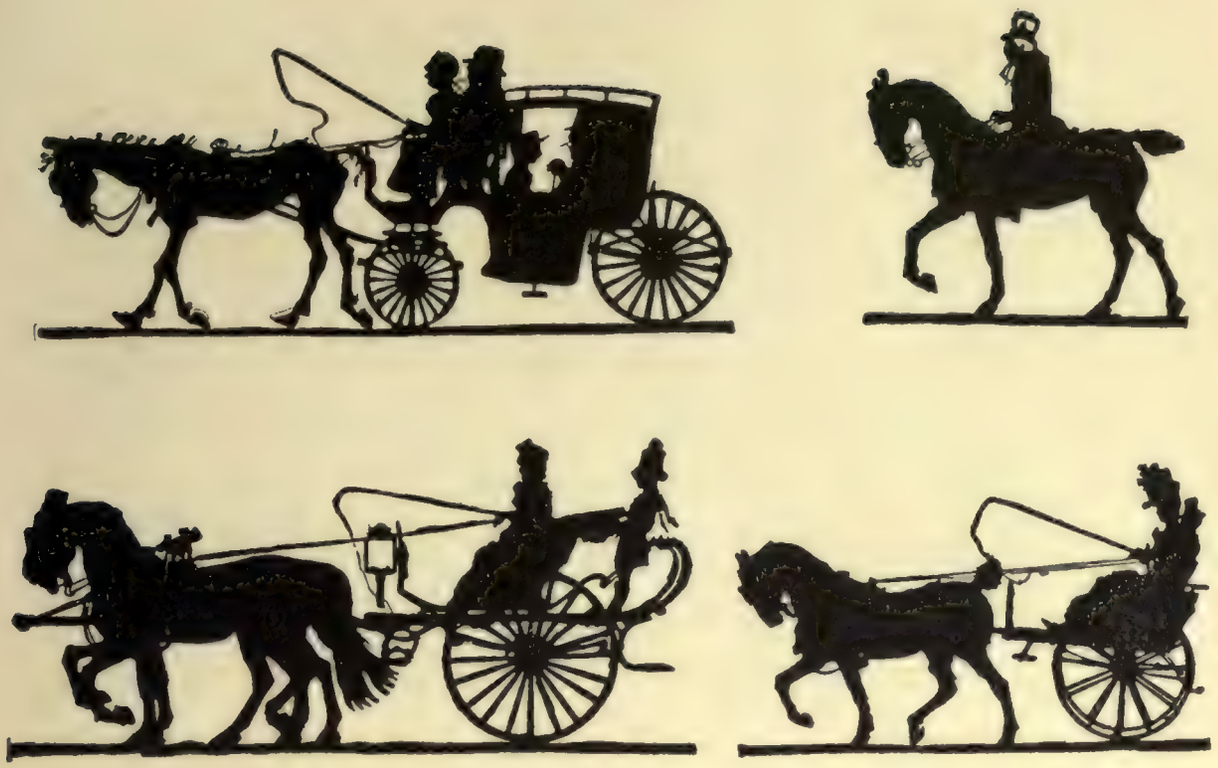
Then a boatman appears, rowing his little skiff, his backbone pivoted so that his body can move to and fro. The traveler makes a bargain with him and is taken across, after many misadventures, one of them with a crocodile, which opens its jaws and threatens to engulf the boat—this amphibious beast having been a recent addition to the original playlet, and probably borrowed from the Green Monster not long ago added to the group of Punch and Judy figures. And the exciting conclusion of this entrancing spectacle displays a most moral application of the principle of poetic justice. The ill-natured laborer advances too far out on his edge of the broken bridge, and detaches a large fragment. As this tumbles into the water he loses his footing and falls forward himself, only to be instantly devoured by the crocodile, which disappears with its unexpected prey, whereupon the placid ducks and geese again swim over—and the curtain falls.

II

There are a score of other little plays like the 'Broken Bridge,' adroitly adjusted to the caliber of the juvenile mind. In a British collection may be found a piece

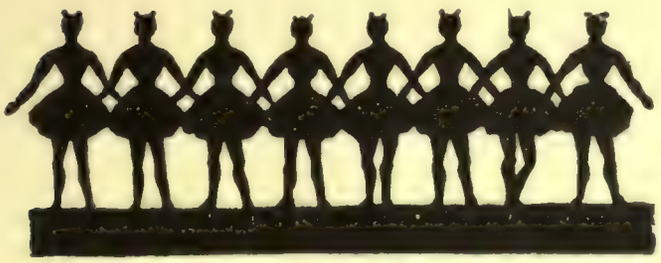
representing a succession of appalling episodes supposed to take place in a 'Haunted House,' and in a French manual for the use of youthful amateurs may be discovered a rudimentary version of Molière's 'Imaginary Invalid,' to be performed by silhouettes with articulated limbs. Here again we perceive the inaccuracy of the term "shadow-pantomime," since the most of the figures are not articulated, and, being motionless, they are deprived of the freedom of gesture which is the essential element of true pantomime. Moreover, they are all made to take part in various dialogs, and this again is a negation of the fundamental principle of pantomime, which ought to be wordless. Here the French term "Chinese shadows" is more exact and less limiting than the English "shadow-pantomime." It is perhaps a pity that the old-fashioned term "gallanty-show," has not won a wider acceptance in English.

The little pieces due to Séraphin and his humble followers in France and in England, devised to amuse children only, were simple enough in plot, and yet they were sufficient to suggest to admirers of this unpretending form of theatrical art plays of a more imposing proportion. M. Paul Eudel, the art critic, has published an amply illustrated volume in which he collected the fairy-pieces, and the more spectacular melodramas composed by his grandfather in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in the dark days that preceded Waterloo. And in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, in the dark days that preceded Sedan, M.



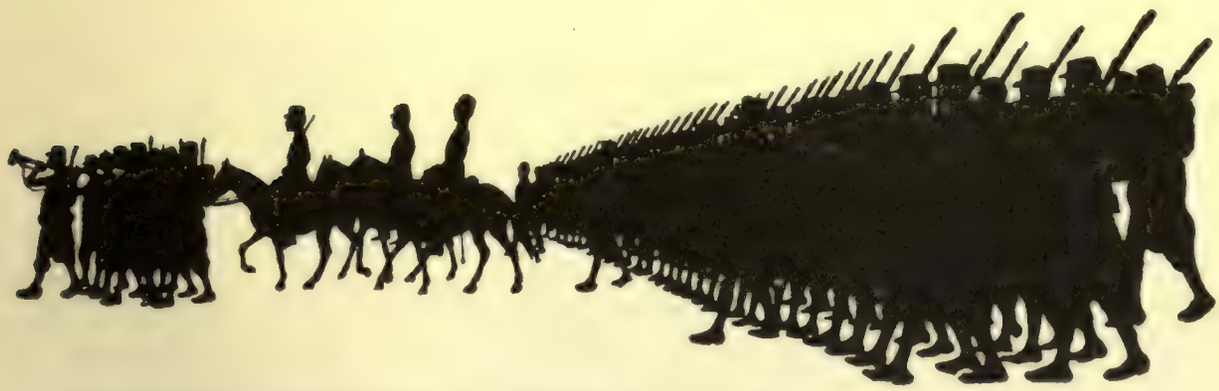
The return from the Bois de Boulogne

Four shadow pictures by Caran d'Ache



The ballet

From a shadow picture by Lemercier de Neuville



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A regiment of French soldiers

From a shadow picture by R. de La Nézière

Lemercier de Neuville, relinquishing for a while the Punch and Judy puppets which he called *Pupazzi,* and which he had exhibited in a succession of gentle caricatures of Parisian personalities with a mildly Aristophanic flavor of contemporary satire, turned to the familiar Chinese shadows of his childhood and devised what he called his *Pupazzi noirs,* animated shadows. He also has issued a collection of these little pieces with a full explanation of the method of performance and with half a hundred illustrations, revealing all the secrets of maneuvering the little figures. Indeed, Lemercier de Neuville's manual is the most ample which has yet appeared; and it is the most interesting in that he was at once his own playwright, his own designer of figures, and his own performer.

As the grandfather of M. Eudel had been more ambitious than Séraphin, so Lemercier de Neuville was more ambitious than the elder Eudel. And yet his procedure was precisely that of his predecessors, and he did not in any way modify the principles of the art. All he did was to elaborate the performance by the use of more scenery, of more spectacular effects, and of more numerous characters. He introduced a company of Spanish dancers, for example, and he did not hesitate to throw on his screen the sable and serrated profile of a long line of ballet dancers. He followed Eudel in arranging a procession of animals, rivaling a circus parade, many of them being articulated so that they could make the appropriate movements of their jaws and their paws. And he paid special attention to his

silhouette caricatures of contemporary celebrities, Zola for one, and Sarah-Bernhardt for another.

Then the Franco-Russian draftsman, who called himself Caran d'Ache, made a new departure and started the art of the shadow-pantomime in a new career. He called his figures "French shadows," *ombres françaises,* and he surrendered the privilege of articulating his figures so that they could move. At least, he refrained from this except on rare occasions, preferring the effect of immobility and relying mainly upon a new principle not before employed by any of his predecessors. He made a specialty of long lines and of large masses of troops, not all on the same plane, but presented in perspective. He chose also to forgo the aid of speech and his figures were silent, except when some officer called out a word of command, or when a company of Cossacks rode past singing one of the wailing lyrics of the Caucasus as melancholy as the steppes.

One of the most attractive items on his program was a representation of the return of vehicles and equestrians from the Bois de Boulogne in the afternoon. Some of the figures were merely characteristic types sharply seized and outlined with all the artist's masterly draftsmanship, and some of them were well-known personages easily recognizable by his Parisian spectators—Lesseps on horseback, for example, and Rochefort in an open cab. These successive figures were simply pushed across the screen one after another, each of them as motionless as a statue, the men fixed



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The Sphinx I: Pharaoh passing in triumph

From a shadow picture by Amédée Vignola

in one attitude, and the legs of the horses retaining always the same position. This absence of animal movement was, of course, a violation from the facts of life, like that which permits the painter to depict a breaking wave or a sculptor to model a running boy at a single moment of the movement. Yet this artistic convention was immediately acceptable since the spectator received a simplified impression and his attention was not distracted by the inevitable jerkiness of the limbs of the men and the beasts.

Caran d'Ache's masterpiece, however—and it may honestly be styled a masterpiece—was not the 'Return from the Bois de Boulogne' but his 'Epopée,' his epic evocation of the grand army of Napoleon. Single figures like the Little Corporal on horseback, and like Murat and others of the Emperor's staff, he projected with a fidelity and a veracity of accent worthy of Detaille or even Meissonier. Yet fine as these single figures might be, they were only what had been attempted by earlier exponents of the art—even if they were more impressive than had been achieved by any one of his predecessors. These single figures were necessarily presented all on the same plane, and the startling and successful innovation of the Franco-Russian draftsmanship was his skilful use of perspective, a device which had not occurred to any of those in whose footsteps he was following, even Lemercier de Neuville having presented his ballet dancers in a flat row. What Caran d'Ache did was to bring before us company after company of the Old Guard, and troop

after troop of cuirassiers, their profiles diminishing in height as the figures receded from the eye. He thus attained to an effect of solidity and even of immensity, far beyond anything ever before achieved by any earlier exhibitor of shadows. He succeeded in suggesting space, and of maneuvering before the astonished eyes of the entranced spectators a vast mass of men under arms, marching forward resolutely in serried ranks to victory or to death.

The late Jules Lemaître, the most open-minded of French dramatic critics, and the most hospitable in his attitude toward the minor manifestations of theatric art, has recorded that this Napoleonic epic of Caran d'Ache communicated to him not only an emotion of actual grandeur, but also the thrill of war itself. He declared that "by the exactness of the perspective preserved in his long files of soldiers, Caran d'Ache gives us the illusion of number and of a number immense and indefinite. And by the automatic movement which sets all his troops in action at once, he gives us the illusion of a single soul, of a communal thought animating innumerable bodies—and thereby he evokes in us the impression of measureless power. . . . His silent poem, with its sliding profiles is, I think, the only epic in all French literature." And those who are familiar with the other French efforts to attain to lyric largeness, and who have had also the unforgetable felicity of beholding Caran d'Ache's marvelous projection of the Napoleonic legend, will be prepared to admit that Lemaître did not overstate the case.



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The Sphinx II: Moses leading his people out of Egypt

From a shadow picture by Amédée Vignola

III

What the Franco-Russian artist had done was to reveal the alluring possibilities placed at the command of the shadow-pantomimist by the ingenious employment of perspective; and there remained only one more step to be taken for the final development of the art to its ultimate capacity. This was the addition of color; and this step was taken by an associate of Caran d'Ache in the exhibitions given at the Chat Noir —Henri Rivière. Color could be added in two ways. In the first place, the outlines of lanterns and of battle-flags could be cut out, and slips of appropriately tinted paper could be inserted in the openings so that the light might shine thru. This relieved the monotony of the uniformity of the sable figures, and added a note of amusing gaiety. But this was an innovation of very limited scope; and it could have been earlier utilized in the flat figures of Lemercier de Neuville, for example, if he had happened to think of it. Far wider in its artistic possibilities was the second of Rivière's improvements. For the ordinary lamp which cast a steady glow on the white screen whereon the profile figures appeared, he substituted a magic lantern, the painted slides of which enabled him to supply an appropriately colored background. Then he went further and employed two magic lanterns, superimposed; and these enabled him to get the effect of "dissolving views" whereby he could vary his background at will.

The immediate result of this ingenious improvement was that the artist could bestow upon his shadow-pantomime not a little of the richness of color which delights our eyes in the stained glass of medieval cathedrals.

Rivière was not only an inventor, he was also an artist, richly gifted with imagination; and his imagination suggested to him at once the three or four themes best fitted for treatment by his novel apparatus. One of these was the 'Wandering Jew'; another was the 'Prodigal Son'; and a third was the 'Temptation of Saint Anthony'—all legends of combined dramatic and pictorial appeal. Yet the most effective of all the experiments in this new form was due not to Rivière himself but to the collaboration of two of his disciples, M. Fragerolle and M. Vignola. This was the 'Sphinx,' in which the artists most adroitly combined all the advantages of the original flat profiles, and of the long files of figures in perspective such as Caran d'Ache had employed, with varied backgrounds due to the aid of the magic lantern first utilized by Rivière. Of all human monuments no one has had so marvelous a series of spectacles pass before its sightless eyes as the Sphinx, reclining impassive at the edge of the desert, and at the foot of the pyramids. Race after race has descended into the valley of the Nile, and lingered for a little space, a few centuries more or less, and departed at last. Conqueror after conqueror has come and gone again; and the Sphinx has kept its inscrutable smile.

M. Fragerolle composed the music and the words of



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The Sphinx III: Roman warriors in Egypt

From a shadow picture by Amédée Vignola

the stately chants which accompanied the exhibition of the figures passing before the backgrounds, due to the pencil and the palette of M. Vignola. By the aid of the magic lantern the gigantic visage of the lion with a woman's head towers aloft, permanent and immutable, while the joyous procession of Egyptian dancers and soldiers and priests celebrates the completion of the statue itself. Then we are witnesses of the fierce invasion of the Assyrians, with the charge of their chariots and their horsemen; and we behold the rout of the natives while their capital burns in the distance. Next we gaze at the departure of the Jews, led by Moses and laden with the spoils of the Egyptians. After the Hebrews have gone, Sesostris appears, to be greeted by a glad outpouring of the populace. Yet soon the Persians descend on Egypt, with their castellated elephants and their immense hordes of fighting men. Still the Sphinx looks down, immovable and implacable; and the Greeks in turn take the valley of the Nile for their own. One of their daughters, Cleopatra, floats past in her galley by night; and in the morning she extends her hospitality to the Roman, Cæsar or Antony. And while the Latins are the rulers of the land of Egypt, the Virgin and her Son with the patient ass that bears a precious burden, skirt the sandy waste, and go on their way to the Holy Land, leaving the Sphinx behind them as they journey forward in the green moonlight. After long centuries the Arabs break in with their brilliant bands of horsemen, and a little later the Crusaders come to give them

battle. More long centuries elapse and suddenly Napoleon emerges at the head of the troops of the French Republic. Then we have the Egypt of to-day, with the British soldiers parading before the feet of the Sphinx; and finally the recumbent statue appears to us once more and for the last time, when the light of the sun is going out, and the world is emptied of its population again, and the ice is settling down on the Sphinx, alone amid freezing desolation. And this last vision is projected by the magic lantern, without the aid of any profile figures, since man has ceased to be.

Here we have a true epic poem, simple yet grandiose, and possible only to the improved shadow-pantomime of France at the end of the nineteenth century—even if this art is only a logical evolution from the gallanty-show of Séraphin. "This humble black profile," said Jules Lemaître, "which had been thought fit at best of a few comic effects to amuse little children only, has been diversified and colored; it has been made beautiful, serious, tragic; by the multiplication of the devices it has been rendered capable of giving us a powerful impression of collective life, and the artists who have developed it have known how to make it translate to our eyes the great spectacles of history and the sweeping movement of multitudes."

(1912.)



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The Sphinx IV: The British troops to-day

From a shadow picture by Amédée Vignola

XIX

THE PROBLEM OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM

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I

It is now no longer in dispute that there has been in the past score or two of years a striking revival of the drama in the English language, and that there are to-day British and American playwrights who write plays which are worth while—plays which are both actable and readable—plays which often deserve and which sometimes even demand serious critical consideration. This revival has necessarily resulted in calling attention to the present condition of dramatic criticism in Great Britain and in the United States. In a period of dramatic productivity, dramatic criticism has an indisputable function and is charged with an undeniable duty, both to the aspiring play-makers and to the main body of the playgoing public. We cannot help asking ourselves whether our dramatic critics rightly apprehend their function and whether they properly discharge their duty; and to these pressing questions the most conflicting answers are returned.

Some there are who insist that it is hopeless to expect the desired outflowering of dramatic literature in our language to take place so long as our dramatic criticism is as inadequate, as incompetent, and as un-

satisfactory as they declare it to be. Others there are who take a more tolerant view, holding the public itself to be at fault for the existing state of things, and who, therefore, believe that we are now getting dramatic criticism quite as good as we deserve. Few there are who venture to deny that there is room for improvement—altho no two of these agree in their suggestions for bringing about a bettering of present conditions. In the multitude of these counsellors there is darkness and confusion.

Perhaps there is a dim possibility of dissipating a little of this dark confusion by an analysis of the exact content, which we discover in the term "dramatic criticism," and then by a further inquiry as to whether our customary use of the term is not misleading. "Dramatic criticism" to most of us connotes the newspaper reviewing of the nightly spectacles in our theaters. Plainly this was the meaning of the term in the mind of Mr. Howells years ago, when he declared that "our dramatic criticism is probably the most remarkable apparatus of our civilization" and that it "surpasses that of other countries as much as our fire-department. A perfectly equipped engine stands in every newspaper office, with the steam always up, which can be manned in nine seconds and rushed to the first theater where there is the slightest danger of drama within five minutes; and the combined efforts of these tremendous machines can pour a concentrated deluge of cold water upon a play which will put out anything of the kind at once."

There is no denying that this use of the term by Mr. Howells is supported by custom. Yet it is distinctly unfortunate, for if the newspaper comment upon the novelties of the stage is to be accepted as "dramatic criticism," then what term have we left to describe the more piercing and the more comprehensive discussion of the first principles of the art of play-making which we find in Francisque Sarcey and in George Henry Lewes, not to go back to Lessing and to Aristotle? It is equally unfortunate that there is an equivalent inaccuracy in bestowing the title of "literary criticism" upon the newspaper comments upon the current books, for if this journalistic summarizing is to be accepted as "literary criticism," then what are we to call the exquisite evaluation of favorite authors which we find in Matthew Arnold and Sainte-Beuve?

Of course, it is always idle to protest against the popular use or misuse of words and terms and phrases. The people as a whole own the language, and have a right to make it over and to modify the original meaning of words. If popular usage chooses not to distinguish between two very different things, and to call both of them "dramatic criticism," there is no redress, and yet it is impossible to discuss the problem of dramatic criticism except by trying to separate the two things thus confounded. Therefore, for the purpose of this inquiry only, and without any hope of changing the accepted usage, I make bold to suggest that "play-reviewing" might be employed to describe the notices written in the office of a newspaper, notices necessarily

prepared under pressure and under strict limitations of time and space.

These newspaper notices are sometimes careless, they are sometimes perfunctory, and they are sometimes cruel; and occasionally they are careful, conscientious, and clever, done with a dexterity worthy of high praise when we consider all the conditions under which it is displayed. But even at its best, play-reviewing cannot attain to the level of true dramatic criticism, more leisurely in its composition, larger in its scope, and more discriminating in its choice of topic. The play-reviewing of the daily journal is akin in aim to the book-reviewing, which has for its purpose the swift consideration of the volume in vogue at the moment. In our morning and evening papers the book-reviewing and the play-reviewing are both of them necessarily up-to-date, in fact, up-to-the-last-minute. To be contemporaneous, instantly and necessarily and inexorably, is their special quality and their immediate purpose; it is the reason for their existence and the excuse for their being.

II

Here it may be well to cite again the oft-quoted confession of the late Jules Lemaître, writer of volume after volume in which he discussed the leading men of letters of his own time and of his own country: "Criticism of our contemporaries is not criticism—it is conversation." Now, conversation may be a very good

thing; indeed, when it is as clear and as sparkling as was Lemaître's, it is an excellent thing; yet he was right in admitting that it is not criticism, since it could not but lack the touchstone of time, the perspective of distance, the assured application of the eternal standards. And play-reviewing, like book-reviewing, cannot be anything but conversation about our contemporaries. It may descend to chaff-like chatter about the writers of the hour and to empty gossip about their sayings and doings; or it may have the sterner merits of brilliant conversation at its best. But it is not really criticism in the finer sense of the word; it cannot be; and one may go further and say that it ought not to be, since true criticism is more or less out of place in a newspaper—because the direct object of a newspaper is to present the news, with only the swiftest of commentaries thereon.

The final distinction between literature and journalism is to be sought in their diverging and irreconcilable objects. The desire of the former is for permanence, and the aim of the latter is the immediate impression. When literature triumphs it is for all time—more or less. When journalism most completely achieves its purpose its success is temporary, to be retained only by iteration and reiteration, since it has for its target the events of the fleeting moment. If we admit this distinction between journalism and literature, we have no difficulty in discovering journalism in many places other than the daily and weekly papers; very properly it fills the most of the space in the monthly magazines,

and even in the quarterly reviews; and it abounds in our book-stores, since only a small proportion of the volumes which pour from the press every year possess the combined substance and style, the solidity of matter and the delightfulness of manner which lift mere writing up to the loftier level of literature.

On the other hand, we may find literature of inexpugnable quality, not only in the magazines, but also now and again in the newspapers. Drake's 'American Flag' and Kipling's 'Recessional' appeared in daily journals, and so did the literary criticism of Sainte-Beuve and the dramatic criticism of Lessing and of Lemaître. But these were but happy accidents, and the great newspaper editor has rarely striven to make his journal a persistent vehicle for the publication of literature. He feels that this is foreign to his main purpose, and he is content when his editorial articles, and his news stories are vigorous and picturesque—clean, clear, and cogent in their English. He knows, better than any one else, that it is not by its external literary merits that newspaper-writing is to be judged. What he wants above all else is the news, all the news, and nothing but the news—accompanied, of course, by the obligatory comment this news may deserve. He needs editorial writers, reporters, and correspondents who are newspaper men, and not men of letters, except in so far as these men of letters may have accepted the special conditions of newspaper work.

Now, criticism, whether literary or dramatic, is a department of literature, dealing with the permanent,

and having little to do with the temporary. It demands qualifications very rarely united—insight, equipment, disinterestedness, and sympathy. So far from being easy, criticism is quite as difficult as creation—more difficult, indeed, if we may judge by its greater rarity. In a superbly creative period there are sometimes three or four distinguished poets, friendly rivals, almost contemporaneous; and even at such a time there is rarely more than one critic worthy to be companioned with them. Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides followed one after the other; and in time the sole Aristotle came forward as their critic. Corneille and Molière and Racine labored side by side, and only Boileau was competent to interpret and to encourage them.

When it attains to the serene plane of Aristotle and Boileau, of Lessing and Sainte-Beuve, criticism is actually creation. "The critical faculty as applied to the masterpieces of literature, and still more the critical faculty as applied to the art of literature itself, is akin to the creative faculty of the artist," so Professor Mackail has told us. "It does not deal with letters as something detached from life, but as the form or substance in which life is intelligibly presented. Its interpretation is also creation." But the criticism of dramatic literature which is also creation, is possible only when the critical faculty is applied to the masterpieces of dramatic literature; and nobody knows better than the play-reviewer that masterpieces of dramatic literature do not present themselves fre-

quently and that they cannot be acclaimed as masterpieces until they have stood the test of time. And this is why a critic-creator would be a little out of place on the staff of a newspaper, daily or weekly, whether he was assigned to deal with the drama or with literature at large.

III

The necessary task of the book-reviewer or of the play-reviewer, is not criticism of the creative kind, since for that he is always likely to lack material. His task is humbler even if it is honorable; it is to report upon the novelties of the day, and to inform the readers of the newspaper as to the nature and the merits of these novelties. His work is essentially reporting, even if it is reporting of a special kind, calling for special qualifications. The connection of the drama with the show business is intimate, and it always has been. In the long history of the theater there is no period without its successful pieces, the appeal of which was mainly sensuous—to the eye and to the ear, rather than to the emotions and to the intellect. While the drama is an art, and perhaps the loftiest of the arts, the show business is a trade. This is no new thing—altho ignorant idealists often declare it so to be, and altho it may make itself a little more obvious at one time than at another. What confronts us is the condition of things as they are, not the theory of things as they might be.

There would be occupation for a dramatic critic, who was also a creator, only if our theaters were presenting in rapid succession a sequence of masterpieces, tragedies of austere power, comedies of searching satire, social dramas of piercing suggestion. But this is not the case now here in the United States in the twentieth century; and it never has been the case anywhere or anywhen, not even in Weimar when Goethe dominated the ducal theater. In our playhouses we are proffered our choice of Shakspere and Ibsen, Pinero and Hauptmann, Henry Arthur Jones and Augustus Thomas, Barrie and Gillette, Sardou and George M. Cohan; and at the same time we are invited to choose between 'Trilby' and the 'Celebrated Case,' melodramas and farces, summer song-shows and ultra-contemporary reviews, alleged comic operas and terpsichorean spectacles. Most of these latter exhibitions do not demand or deserve criticism of any kind; but they need to be reported upon like any other item in the news of the day.

If this is the case, it might as well be recognized frankly. There is always advantage in seeing things as they are, in fronting the facts and in looking them squarely in the face. Sooner or later some one of those who are in charge of our metropolitan newspapers will perceive the possibility of a change of method. He will charge one of his staff with the supervision of the theatrical news, the announcements of new plays, and the personal gossip about the players; and he will authorize this editor to send competent reporters to

all first performances, directed to report upon them as they would report upon any other event of immediate interest. He would warn these reporters that they were strictly to consider themselves as reporters, and that they were, therefore, to refrain from explicit criticism. He would so select his men that a melodrama should be dealt with by a reporter who liked a good melodrama, and that a summer song-show should be described by a reporter who could find pleasure in inoffensive and amusing spectacle. If this policy should be adopted, and announced clearly and emphatically, probably most of the occasions for quarrel between managers and editors would disappear; and the immense majority of the readers of the daily paper would be supplied with exactly the information they would prefer.

Then, for the benefit of the smaller number who are really interested in the drama as a serious art, the editor-in-chief might avail himself of the fact that the Sunday issue, while it is still a newspaper containing the news of the preceding twenty-four hours, is also a magazine, to be read in more leisurely fashion, and therefore at liberty to treat timely topics with a larger freedom. Here space could be found for genuine dramatic criticism by the most competent expert available. This dramatic critic should have nothing whatever to do with the news of the theaters, or with the first-night play-reviewing. He should not be tired and bored by having to go to the theater half a dozen times a week, and by being forced to analyze plays which do

not reward analysis. He would be expected to select out of the current performances that one which promised to be most worthy of careful consideration, and he would feel himself free to discuss this at such length as it might seem to him to deserve. To him also should be intrusted the more significant of the new books upon the history of the theater, and upon the art of the drama. In the summer (and also whenever at any other season there might be a dearth of inspiring topics), this dramatic critic would not be expected to contribute, since he should never be called upon to make bricks without straw.

Even in New York this method is not as new as it may seem, and more than one metropolitan daily has approximated to it, altho no one of them has completely detached the dramatic critic from the play-reviewer and from the supervisor of theatrical gossip. And it has long been adopted in certain of the Paris newspapers. In the *Temps*, for example, when Sarcey was its dramatic critic, there was a daily column of theatrical announcements and of brief reports upon first-night performances; and with this department of the news of the theaters Sarcey had nothing to do, and for it he had no responsibility. Then in the ample space specially reserved for him in the issue of every Sunday afternoon, he dealt with the dramatic themes that seemed to him worth while. If a play appeared to demand prolonged study, he might go to see it two, or even three times, before he undertook to formulate his opinion; and on occasion he would carry

over his detailed discussion of a very important drama into the article of the following Sunday. On the other hand, if no recent play seemed to him to deserve his continued attention, he would devote himself to one of the recent books about the theater or to a detailed discussion of the proper interpretation of one of the classics of the French drama kept constantly in the repertory of the Comédie-Française.

IV

The adoption of this method would relieve the dramatic critic from one of his existing disadvantages; he would be released from criticising the pieces which are beneath criticism. The literary critic, and even the ordinary book-reviewer, never spends his time in considering dime novels—whereas the dramatic critic is now called upon to waste many evenings in beholding a play which is only the theatrical equivalent of a dime novel. The immediate result of this futile and fatiguing expenditure of energy is likely to be discouraging and even enervating. If the dramatic critic could be totally relieved from all contact with the show business when the show business has only a casual connection with the drama, it would tend to keep him fit for his essential task. Under the present conditions it is no wonder that the theatrical reviewer wearies of his task and loses the gusto and the zest without which all work tends to degenerate into the perfunctory and the mechanical.

We need not fear that the first-night reporting would be ill done if competent reporters were instructed that they were not to consider themselves as critics, and that it was their sole duty to report, as they would report anything else, conscientiously and accurately. The difficulty would not be in finding reporters able to discharge this duty, it would be in the discovery of dramatic critics possessing the fourfold qualifications of insight, equipment, disinterestedness, and sympathy, which every critic must be endowed with whatever the art he undertakes to anaylze. And the difficulty would be increased by the fact that the dramatic critic needs an understanding of three different arts, the art of acting, the art of literature, and the art of the drama —of play-making as distinct from literature.

It would be idle to hope that even if this method were adopted we should soon be able to develop in the United States and in Great Britain a group of dramatic critics of the capacity and the quality of Lessing and Sarcey, of George Henry Lewes and William Archer. Yet it is solely by the adoption of this method that we can hope to provide the opportunity for the appearance of the true dramatic critic, who can fit himself for his finer work only by being set free from the necessity of doing work quite unworthy of him, altho necessary to the newspaper itself. And the development of a group of dramatic critics of a higher type than can be found to-day—except possibly in a scant half-dozen dailies and weeklies and monthlies—is a condition precedent to the development of our

drama. Of course, these dramatic critics, whatever their endowment, could give little help directly to the dramatic authors, since it is a mistake to suppose that the critic is capable of counselling the author, or that he is charged with any such duty. Where the critic can help is by disseminating knowledge about the dramatic art, and by raising the standard of appreciation in the public at large—that public which even the mightiest dramatist has to please or else to fail of his purpose.

(1915.)

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A book about the theater